



Authorities search an area Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015, following a shooting that killed multiple people at a social services center for the disabled in San Bernardino, Calif. (James Quigg/The Victor Valley Daily Press via AP)



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UK votes to launch airstrikes on IS in Syria

JILL LAWLESS
DANICA KIRKA
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British lawmakers voted by a wide margin Wednesday to join the international campaign of airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria, after Prime Minister David Cameron asserted that bombing the “medieval monsters” in their heartland would make Britain safer.

The 397-223 vote in the House of Commons means Royal Air Force fighter jets — already operating against

ian civil war.

Cameron has long wanted to target IS in Syria, but had been unsure of getting majority support in the House of Commons until now. He suffered an embarrassing defeat in 2013 when lawmakers rejected a motion backing attacks on the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The mood has changed following the Nov. 13 Paris attacks, claimed by IS, that killed 130 people. Both France and the U.S. have urged Britain to join their air campaign in Syria,

well as members of the smaller Liberal Democrat party and others.

Labour, the main opposition, was divided. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn — who represents the left wing of the party — spoke against what he called a “reckless and half-baked intervention.” But more than 60 Labour lawmakers, including senior party figures, voted in support of airstrikes, a move likely to make fissures between the right and the left of the party even worse.

Labour foreign affairs



Protesters hold placards protesting against Britain launching airstrikes on the Islamic State group inside Syria, during a demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament in London, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015.
(AP Photo/Tim Ireland)

IS in Iraq from a base in Cyprus — could be flying over Syria within hours. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond told Channel 4 news that the strikes would begin “very quickly ... probably not tonight but it could be tomorrow night.”

Anti-war protesters outside Parliament booed as they learned the result of the vote. The decision came after an emotional 10 1/2-hour debate in which Cameron said that Britain must strike the militants in their heartland and not “sit back and wait for them to attack us.”

Opponents argued that Britain’s entry into Syria’s crowded airspace would make little difference, and said Cameron’s military plan was based on wishful thinking that overlooked the messy reality of the Syr-

and Cameron said Britain should not let its allies down.

He said Britain was already a top target for IS attacks, and airstrikes would reduce the group’s ability to plan more Paris-style carnage.

“Do we work with our allies to degrade and destroy this threat and do we go after these terrorists in their heartlands, from where they are plotting to kill British people?” he said. “Or do we sit back and wait for them to attack us?”

He said that attacking IS was not anti-Muslim but “a defense of Islam” against “women-rape, Muslim-murdering, medieval monsters.”

Cameron was backed by most members of his governing Conservative Party — which holds 330 of the 650 Commons seats — as

spokesman Hilary Benn said Britain could not “walk by on the other side of the road” when international allies were asking for help against IS “fascists.”

Britain already conducts airstrikes against IS targets in Iraq, and in August launched a drone strike that killed two British IS militants in Syria.

British officials say Royal Air Force Typhoon and Tornado fighter jets, armed with Brimstone missiles capable of hitting moving targets, would bring the campaign highly accurate firepower and help minimize civilian casualties.

President Barack Obama welcomed the British vote to join the air campaign in Syria, saying the Islamic Stategroup “is a global threat that must be defeated by a global response.” □

India, Brazil resist global push for long-term carbon emission goals

KARL RITTER
SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

LE BOURGET, France (AP) — Attempts to inscribe a long-term goal to phase out carbon emissions in an envisioned global climate pact are facing pushback at U.N. talks from big developing countries including India and Brazil.

Negotiators from both countries said Wednesday they favor sticking to the already established goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F) above pre-industrial times — a level that scientists say could avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

That goal was formally introduced in the U.N. talks in 2010. But many countries are calling for the Paris deal to include a road map on how to achieve it, such as a joint target for phasing out the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases blamed for global warming.

Various options have been proposed. The United States and other members of the Group of Seven wealthy countries earlier this year endorsed a “decarbonization of the global economy over the course of this century.”

“Decarbonization is something that has appeared recently. We don’t even know what that means,” Indian delegate Ajay Mathur told reporters. “Does it mean zero carbon? Does it mean net zero carbon?” The term is generally understood to mean sharp reductions of carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, but it hasn’t been defined precisely.

Brazil’s lead negotiator Antonio Marcondes told The Associated Press that there was no need to come up with a new joint climate goal.

“The long-term goal is already there: It’s 2 degree Celsius,” he said.

Marcondes added that Brazil would consider options that emphasize that phasing out fossil fuels will be easier for some countries than others. He referred to a joint Brazilian-German declaration in August that backed a “decarbonization of the global economy” while noting that some countries will need financial and technological help to make the transition to cleaner energy. The long-term goal is one of the issues that split the larger group of developing countries in the climate talks. Oil-rich Saudi Arabia opposes wording calling for a phase-out of carbon emissions, while small island nations that face an existential risk from rising seas are among the strongest advocates. China has largely stayed silent.

It’s among the crunch issues that need to be resolved before negotiators can ink what would be the first climate deal to ask all countries to limit their greenhouse gas emissions. Another is how to ramp up the individual emissions targets that nations have proposed because scientific analyses show they’re not consistent with the 2-degree target.

“We must speed the process up because we have much work to do,” French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told a news conference on Wednesday.

Fabius said negotiators need to come up with a new draft agreement by noon Saturday so that environment and foreign ministers have something to work with when they arrive for the second week of talks.

Speaking at a NATO conference in Brussels, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said he thought the climate talks “got off to an encouraging start” with 150 world leaders — the biggest ever gathering of heads of state and government — attending the opening day. Kerry is expected to join the meeting next week. □

At Press Time:

14 Dead, Several Wounded In California Mass Shooting

AMANDA LEE MYERS
JUSTIN PRITCHARD

Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif.

(AP) — As many as three heavily armed attackers opened fire on a banquet at a social services center for the disabled Wednesday, killing 14 people and seriously wounding more than a dozen others "as if they were on a mission," authorities said.

The attackers escaped, setting a large region east of Los Angeles on edge, but about four hours later police riddled a black SUV with gunfire two miles (3 kilometers) from the late-morning carnage.

A man and woman in the SUV with assault rifles, handguns and "assault-style clothing" were killed, Police Chief Jarrod Burguan said. A third person who was spotted running away near the scene of the gun battle was detained, but Burguan said it was unclear if that person had anything to do with the crime.

It was the deadliest mass shooting in a nation all too familiar with them since 2012, when a man killed 26 children and adults at a school in the Newtown, Connecticut.

Police shed no light on a motive for Wednesday's

massacre, which came just five days after a gunman opened fire at Planned Parenthood in Colorado, killing three.

In what authorities de-

ter.

"They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission," the police chief said.

Authorities also found a

ing for her daughter and son-in-law, both of whom work at the center. "She gets all the services she possibly could for these kids. So I just don't understand why

men.

Several people locked themselves in their offices, desperately waiting to be rescued by police, after the gunfire erupted. Some texted their loved ones or telephoned them and whispered to them what was going on.

Ten of the wounded were hospitalized in critical condition, and three were in serious condition, San Bernardino Fire Chief Tom Hannemann said. Police cautioned that the numbers of dead and wounded were early estimates that could change.

No weapons were found at the center, though authorities were investigating unidentified items in the building and brought in bomb squads, Burguan said.

As the manhunt went on, stores, office buildings and at least one school were locked down in the city of 214,000 people about 60 miles (100 kilometers) east of Los Angeles, and roads were blocked off.

Triage units were set up outside the center, and people were seen being wheeled away on stretchers. Others walked quickly from a building with their hands up. They were searched by police before being reunited with loved ones. □



In this image taken from video, armored vehicles surround an SUV following a shootout in San Bernardino, Calif., Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. The scene followed a military-style attack that killed multiple people and wounded others at a California center that serves people with developmental disabilities, authorities said.

(KTTV via AP)

scribed as a precision assault, the gunmen invaded the Inland Regional Center and began shooting around 11 a.m. They opened fire in a conference area that the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health had rented out for a banquet, said Marybeth Feild, president and CEO of the cen-

potential explosive device found at the social service center.

That the violence happened at a place dedicated to helping people with developmental disabilities made it even harder for some to comprehend.

"These are all disabled kids, very disabled," said Sherry Esquerra, who was search-

somebody would come in and start shooting."

FBI agents and other law enforcement authorities converged on the center and searched room to room for the attackers, but they had apparently escaped. Cervantes, the police spokeswoman, said there were reports from witnesses of one to three gun-

California attack is latest in deadly US mass shootings

The Associated Press

An attack at a Southern California social services center Wednesday became the latest mass shooting in the United States.

Here's a look at some of the deadliest U.S. shootings since 2012:

— **Dec. 2, 2015:** As many as three gunmen opened fire at a social services center in San Bernardino, California, killing at least 14 people and wounding more than a dozen, authorities said. The attackers escaped, but police said one male and one female suspect were later killed in a shootout with officers. Police detained a third person, but it was unclear if that person was connected to the mass

shooting.

— **Oct 1, 2015:** A shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, left 10 people dead and seven wounded, authorities said. Shooter Christopher Harper-Mercer, 26, exchanged gunfire with police then killed himself.

— **June 17, 2015:** Dylan Roof, 21, shot and killed nine African-American church members during a Bible study group inside the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Police contend the attack was racially motivated. Roof faces nine counts of murder in state court and dozens of federal charges, including hate crimes.

— **May 23, 2014:** A community college student, Elliot Rodger, 22, killed six people and wounded 13 others in shooting and stabbing attacks in the area near the University of California, Santa Barbara, campus. Authorities said he apparently shot himself to death after a shootout with deputies.

— **Sept. 16, 2013:** Aaron Alexis, a mentally disturbed civilian contractor, shot 12 people to death at the Washington Navy Yard before he was killed in a police shootout.

— **July 26, 2013:** Pedro Vargas, 42, went on a shooting rampage at his Hialeah, Florida, apartment building, killing six people before being shot to death by po-

lice.

— **Dec 14, 2012:** In Newtown, Connecticut, an armed 20-year-old man entered Sandy Hook Elementary School and used a semi-automatic rifle to slay 26 people, including 20 first graders and six adult school staff members, before killing himself.

— **Sept. 27, 2012:** In Minnesota's deadliest workplace killing spree, Andrew Engeldinger, who had just been fired, pulled a gun and fatally shot six people, including the company's founder. He also wounded two others at Accent Signage Systems in Minneapolis before killing himself.

— **August 5, 2012:** In Oak Creek, Wisconsin, 40-year-

old gunman Wade Michael Page killed six worshippers at a Sikh Temple before taking his own life.

— **July 20, 2012:** James Holmes, 27, killed 12 people and wounded 70 in Aurora, Colorado, movie theater. He was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

— **April 2, 2012:** Seven people were killed and three were wounded when a 43-year-old former student opened fire at Oikos University, in Oakland, California. One Goh was charged with seven counts of murder and three counts of attempted murder but psychiatric evaluations concluded he suffers from long-term paranoid schizophrenia and is unfit to stand trial. □



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Former Miami police officer is sentenced for aiding drug ring

DAVID PORTER
Associated Press
NEWARK, New Jersey (AP)

— A former Miami police lieutenant who authorities said used his position to help drug smugglers elude security at major airports was sentenced to 10 years in prison Wednesday by a judge who called his actions "truly reprehensible." Ralph Mata, a 22-year veteran of the Miami-Dade police department and a lieutenant for 11 years, stood stoically as the sentence was read. His wife sat in the gallery with her eyes closed and her chin resting on her hand. The two embraced afterward. During a statement to the court, Mata apologized and said he had "tarnished the badge."

He called his crimes the "inexcusable, irrational actions of a foolish man" that dishonored his family, his job and the community he once served.

"I realized I didn't have the courage to deal with my weaknesses" that included a drinking problem, he said.

U.S. District Judge Susan Wigenton was unmoved by Mata's apology or by his attorneys' noting that

he has cooperated with authorities since his arrest last year and made numerous secret audio and video recordings that could lead to further prosecutions.

According to Wigenton, the evidence showed Mata wasn't a dupe forced into helping the drug ring, but instead was an active participant who "stopped at nothing" to offer his assistance. That included traveling between Florida, New York and the Dominican Republic, and setting up bank accounts to receive drug proceeds. Prosecutors alleged Mata, who was nicknamed "The Milk Man," helped members of the New Jersey-based organization move hundreds of thousands of dollars in illicit profits.

He also allegedly used his airport contacts to smuggle weapons concealed in luggage to the dealers and even suggested how they might carry out a potential hit on a rival gang.

The sentence was squarely in the middle of the range contained in federal sentencing guidelines which recommended a sentence between nine years and a little more than 11 years. □

Prosecutor: Officer could've saved black man's life

DAVID DISHNEAU
JULIET LINDERMAN
Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The first of six Baltimore police officers charged in the death of a 25-year-old black man who suffered a spinal injury went on trial Wednesday, seven months after the city erupted in riots over the case. Freddie Gray died a week after suffering the critical injury when he was handcuffed and shackled in a police transport van. In his opening statement, a prosecutor Michael Schatzow said Officer William Porter could have saved Gray's life simply by pushing a button on his uniform to call for a medic. Gray's April 19 death triggered protests and rioting in Baltimore. It became a

rallying cry in the "Black Lives Matter" protest movement, which emerged nationwide in response to several police killings of African-Americans over the past year.

Porter wasn't involved in Gray's initial arrest in April, but he was present at five of six stops that the van made during a 45-minute ride after Gray was taken into custody, prosecutors said. At one point, Porter asked Gray if he needed a medic, and the young black man replied that he could not breathe and could not move from the floor of the van, where he had been placed head-first, in plastic handcuffs and leg shackles.

Instead of calling a medic, prosecutors say Porter

picked Gray up from the floor and placed him in an upright position on the bench, and did not secure him in a seatbelt, as required by Baltimore Police Department policy.

Gray arrived at a police station unresponsive, was taken to a hospital and died a week later.

Porter, who is also black, faces charges of involuntary manslaughter, second-degree assault, misconduct in office and reckless endangerment. The charges carry maximum prison terms totaling about 25 years. His attorneys were to present their opening statement later Wednesday.

Two other officers charged in the case are black and the three others are white. They will be tried separately



William Porter, left, one of six Baltimore city police officers charged in connection to the death of Freddie Gray, walks to a courthouse with his attorney Joseph Murtha in Baltimore. Porter faces charges of manslaughter, assault, reckless endangerment and misconduct in office.

(AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, Pool)

beginning in January. According to a pretrial filing, Porter told investigators that arresting Gray "was always a big scene" and

indicated that he knew of a previous arrest in which Gray allegedly tried to kick out the windows of a police vehicle. □

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Ex-wife says clinic suspect vandalized South Carolina clinic

BRUCE SMITH

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, South Carolina (AP) —

An ex-wife of the man charged with killing three people at a Colorado women's health clinic that offers abortions said he vandalized an abortion clinic years earlier when he lived in South Carolina.

New court documents and interviews reveal Robert Lewis Dear as an occasionally violent, fundamentalist loner who was known to nurse a grudge.

Barbara Mescher Micheau told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Dear came home one day and told her that he put glue in the locks of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Charleston when they were married more than 20 years ago, but it could not have been one run by the national organization. The organization did not have a clinic in the city then, but another clinic offered abortions. "I just remembered it because I haven't thought about him for a long time," said Micheau, whose last contact with Dear was more than seven years ago, when their son turned 18 and Dear no longer needed to come for visits. Micheau said Dear never talked much about Planned Parenthood, a national organization, although "obviously he was against abortion." She also recalled that Dear "was always plotting revenge against people he felt did him wrong, and you know it didn't take much for him to feel like somebody did him wrong."

The 57-year-old Dear faces state charges of first-degree murder for last Friday's shooting. A law enforcement official has said he rambled about "no more baby parts" after his arrest.

Colorado Springs police have refused to disclose a motive for the shooting.

Micheau was the second of Dear's three wives, and in the affidavit she filed to divorce him in 1993, she described him as angry and isolated.

Micheau said Dear had no friends, according to the document. He would listen to music on headphones for hours, ignoring her. He'd vanish for gambling trips to Las Vegas or Atlantic City and suddenly explode in anger at home, kicking her and pulling her hair.

"Rob's anger erupts into fury in a matter of seconds and is alarming," she wrote. "You have to constantly monitor his emotional state."

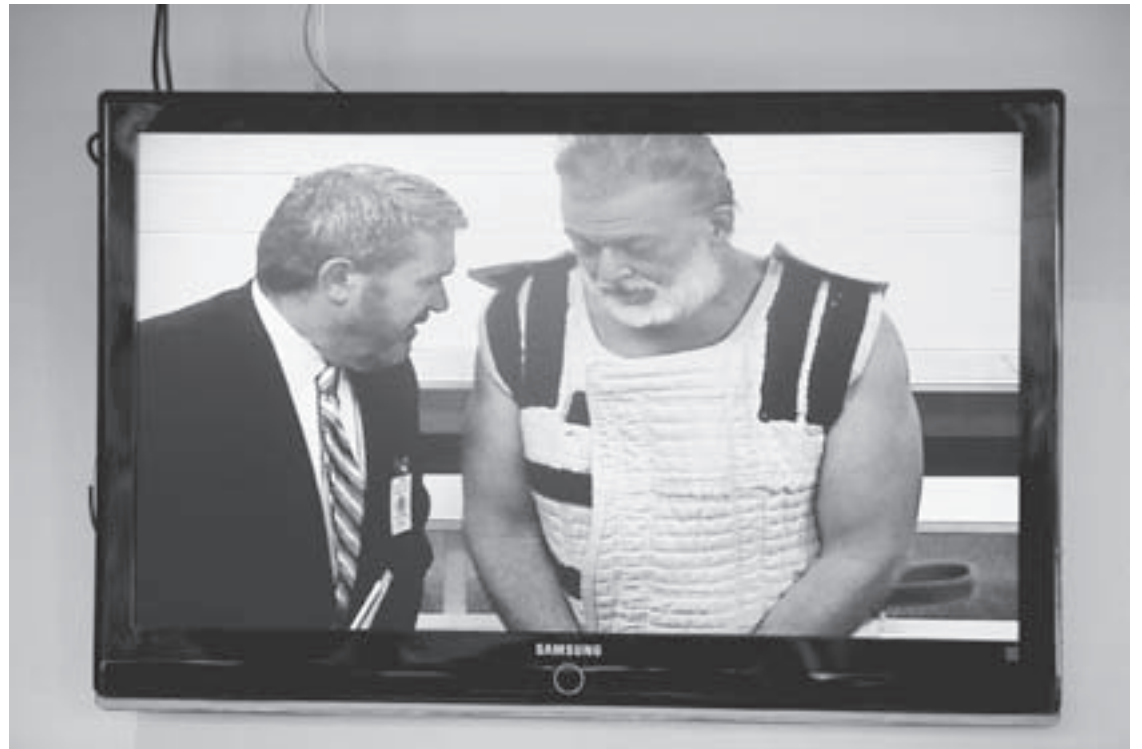
She added that he appeared devoutly religious.

"He claims to be a Christian and is extremely evangelistic, but he does not follow the Bible in his actions," Micheau wrote. "He says as long as he believes he will be saved, he can do whatever he pleases. He is obsessed with the world coming to an end."

Micheau told the AP: "I was just devastated for the people he hurt and the people he killed and their children. As to whether he would do it or not, I wasn't surprised."

In 1992, after Dear and Micheau were separated, he was arrested in South Carolina on a charge of criminal sexual conduct after a woman said he put a knife to her neck, forced her into her apartment and sexually assaulted her. No records show how the case was ultimately handled.

Dear later moved to a white trailer marked with a cross on a desolate stretch of land in Colorado, along with a woman he met in South Carolina. He rarely



Colorado Springs shooting suspect, Robert Dear, right, appears via video before Judge Gilbert Martinez, with public defender Dan King, at the El Paso County Criminal Justice Center, where he was told he faces first degree murder charges, in Colorado Springs, Colo. An ex-wife of Dear said he vandalized an abortion clinic years earlier when he lived in South Carolina.

(Daniel Owen/The Gazette via AP, Pool)

waved to neighbors.

Authorities have spoken

with Dear's girlfriend, Steph-

anie Bragg, who couldn't

be located for comment

Wednesday. □

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American Living:

Lobster, schlobster: Seaweed is Maine's hot new product



A variety of products that use seaweed are displayed at the Royal River Natural Foods store in Freeport, Maine. The products are, from left, ready-to-use sea lettuce, kelp tablets, popcorn flavored with seaweed, pet foods, and an energy snack containing dried kelp.

(AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

PATRICK WHITTLE
Associated Press

BIDDEFORD, Maine (AP) — It's green, it's gooey and it's giving Maine's famous lobsters a run for their money.

Well, not really. At least not yet. But when it comes to seaweed production, Maine is the country's No. 1.

The state now supports more than 20 companies that grow or collect sea-

weed, about double from 10 years ago. Maine harvesters collected 17.7 million pounds of seaweed in 2014 — the most ever recorded for the state and more than four times the 2004 total.

"Maine is excited about seaweed, and the world is excited about seaweed," said Hillary Krapf, founder of the Maine Seaweed Festival, whose second year drew more than 3,000

people in August in South Portland, more than twice the first year. "It's totally piqued right now."

It's true. Seaweed is hot. "More people are interested in sea vegetables, and a lot more Americans are a lot more savvy about eating nutritious foods," said Susan Brawley, a University of Maine botanist. "There's no one profile a seaweed has, just like a tomato is not like a spinach."

Seaweed — formed from marine algae — comes in many forms. Rockweed is by the far the most commonly harvested type in Maine, and its uses include fertilizer, soil conditioner, nutrients for animal feed and extracts by commercial food processors.

But seaweed harvesters and processors here said there is also more interest in at least nine other kinds of seaweed as food, and they tout the plant's high concentration of nutrients. Popular Maine seaweeds include sugar kelp, which can be used as an alternative to pasta, and Irish moss, which is used in brewing beer.

Seaweed production in Maine is just a blip on the worldwide scene, an annual 25 million-ton business that is dominated by China, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Maine overtook California as the biggest producer of seaweed in the U.S. in 2006, state and federal figures show.

Harvesters here said they

have leveraged Maine's marine heritage and the boom in natural foods to grow interest in the state's seaweed. Michael Lomas, who heads a national marine research lab in East Boothbay, Maine, said the growth has raised Maine's national stature as a major seaweed producer.

Small businesses that make a living on seaweed products report more interest in their goods. It's good news for seaweed industry veterans like Shep Erhart, founder of Maine Coast Sea Vegetables, which sells everything from seaweed cookbooks to Applewood-smoked seaweed. He and his wife have been trading in seaweed for more than 40 years.

Many seaweed products are popular because of their artisanal production, he said: "It's really a hand-crafted food."

Some environmentalists register concern about the growth, arguing that stripping rockweed from tidal areas damages coastal ecosystems.

That's one reason growth in seaweed aquaculture, as opposed to wild harvesting, is important to sustain the industry, said Tollef Olson, a South Portland seaweed farmer. He claims to have opened the state's first seaweed farm, on Casco Bay in 2009.

"It gives us a lot of control over the raw materials," said Olson said, noting at least seven other seaweed aquaculture companies do business in Maine today. □

FBI: Background checks for gun sales peak on Black Friday

ALICIA A. CALDWELL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The day after the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, known as Black Friday as shoppers chasing bargains crowd stores, broke an FBI record for the number of firearms background checks.

The agency said Tuesday that it processed 185,345 background checks — roughly two per second — on the same day that three people were killed and nine others wounded in an attack at a Planned Parenthood office in the state of Colorado. The group provides health ser-

vices to women, including abortions.

The FBI received about 5 percent fewer background check requests on Black Friday in 2014, the agency said.

FBI background checks processed by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System

are conducted for gun purchases from federally licensed dealers and for permits to carry guns. A background check does not mean a gun was purchased, but manufacturers rely on the background check statistics as a measurement of the industry's health. □

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Report says US drug maker was focused on profits, not patients

RICARDO ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The makers of a breakthrough drug for hepatitis C put profits before patients in pricing the \$1,000 pill that cures the liver-wasting disease, U.S. Senate investigators said Tuesday.

A bipartisan report from the Senate Finance Committee concluded that California-based Gilead Sciences was focused on maximizing revenue even as the company's own analysis showed a lower price would allow more patients to be treated.

Although the report focused on just one drug that has made headlines in the last few years, the lawmakers who led the investigation said their findings are a warning about what's to come with other high-priced treatments for cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's and HIV.

"I'm telling you, this is the future," said Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, "The future is going to be about specialty drugs."

In a statement, Gilead said it disagreed with the report's conclusions.

The company's first breakthrough pill was called Sovaldi; priced at \$1,000 per pill, or \$84,000 for a full course of treatment. Gilead has since introduced a more expensive next-generation pill called Harvoni, which is highly effective and simpler for patients to take. That one is priced at \$94,500 for a course of treatment.

"Gilead responsibly and thoughtfully priced Sovaldi and Harvoni," said the company's statement, noting that more than 600,000 patients have been treated worldwide since the introduction of Sovaldi two years ago.

But Wyden and Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican, said their 18-month investigation found that the high price tag significantly limited patient access and heaped huge costs on federal and state health care programs.

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that affects some 3 million people in the U.S. and claims more lives here than AIDS. Patients say the disease feels like a bad flu that never goes away. While the illness advances gradually, it can ultimately destroy the liver, requiring a transplant to save the patient's life. The virus is primarily spread by contact with infected blood. More than three out of four infected adults are baby boomers, the age group now entering Medicare. That health program will spend more than \$9 billion this year on drugs for hepatitis C, according to government estimates released prior to the Senate report.

Although professional medical societies recommend the Gilead drugs as first-line treatments for anyone with hepatitis C, the report found that the high cost resulted in less than 3 percent of the potentially eligible Medicaid beneficiaries getting treatment in 2014. Medicaid is the federal-state health program for low-income people. □

US Financial Front: Report predicts more Atlantic City closures

WAYNE PARRY
Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — A Wall Street firm predicts a new wave of casino expansion in the Northeastern U.S. will lead to more casino closings in Atlantic City. Moody's Investors Service

shrinks, some of the remaining casinos have seen revenues increase," Moody's wrote. "But we expect increased competition will keep the heat on incumbents, and that number of casinos in Atlantic City will likely continue to shrink.

ing the Taj Mahal, causing it to close.

Caesars and Bally's are part of a unit of Caesars Entertainment, which is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy as well. At least eight new casinos are expected to open by the end of 2018 in Mary-



This photo shows the exterior of the Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City, N.J. A Wall Street firm predicts a new wave of casino expansion in the Northeastern U.S. will lead to more casino closings in Atlantic City.

(AP Photo/Wayne Parry)

said in a report this week it expects the eight new casinos, altogether worth \$5 billion, that will be opening in the region over the next three years will further stress business in Atlantic City, where four of the 12 gambling halls went out of business in 2014. The closings were due in large part to ever-increasing competition in the region.

Moody's did not predict how many will go belly-up, but said the Trump Taj Mahal, Caesars and Bally's "are already on the brink." Each is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

"As the number of casinos

We expect more casino closures to occur in Atlantic City as some struggle to grow their business and face additional competition." The Taj Mahal is transitioning from the company once owned by Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump to billionaire investor Carl Icahn. Its current owner, Trump Entertainment Resorts, is waiting for an appeals court ruling on whether it will have to restore health insurance and pension benefits it ended for workers in October 2014. Icahn has said if the ruling goes against the company, he will stop fund-

land, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania. Besides Atlantic City casinos, the report said, the new businesses will hurt existing gambling halls in Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

The report noted that the MGM National Harbor casino, the first of the eight projects expected to be up and running, by fall 2016, will be located a little more than 10 miles south of Washington, where it stands to hurt Maryland Live! And in Pennsylvania, a second Philadelphia casino will affect Sugarhouse and Harrah's Philadelphia. □

US-backed alliance faces challenges as a force in Syria

ZEINA KARAM
BASSEM MROUE
Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Drawing on thousands of combatants from Syria's mix of religious and ethnic groups, a U.S.-

State, already faces opposition from other groups fighting to topple President Bashar Assad because those groups widely distrust the Kurds. And while the coalition

IS in Syria, with some estimates putting the number of fighters affiliated with the group at nearly 40,000. "The Syria Democratic Forces are the most organized in the Syrian chaos,"

cano, an alliance of Kurd and Arab factions that last year liberated Kobani from Islamic State militants. It includes Arab forces such as the Sanadiid force, mainly drawn from the Arab Shammar tribe; a Christian militia known as the Syriac Military Council, which includes Assyrians; the mainly Arab Jazira Brigades; the Seljuk Brigade, which consists mostly of Turkmen forces; and the Jaysh al-Thuwar group, which includes U.S.-backed rebels who were routed from Idlib and Aleppo provinces earlier this year by the al-Qaida branch in Syria, the Nusra Front.

Most of those groups are small and poorly equipped. Apart from the YPG, they lack military capabilities beyond defending their towns and villages.

The alliance was announced in the predominantly Kurdish province of Hassakeh on Oct. 10, a day after the U.S. said it was abandoning its effort to build a new rebel force inside Syria to combat the Islamic State group, acknowledging the failure of its \$500 million campaign to train thousands of fighters.

Instead, the U.S. said it would provide support for those already fighting the IS group, which also is known as ISIS, ISIL and its Arabic acronym, Daesh.

A few days after the new alliance was formed, the U.S. dropped weapons and ammunition to Arab

forces in the alliance — an apparent effort to allay Turkish concerns about Washington's support for the YPG. The YPG is seen by Turkey as an extension of the Kurdish PKK, which has waged a long insurgency against Ankara.

The alliance has said it wants to liberate Hassakeh province from IS and move on to the militants' stronghold in Raqqa. U.S. officials have announced plans to deploy dozens of special operations forces in Syria to support it.

Last month, it successfully dislodged IS from the strategic town of Hol near the border with Iraq. That came just as the Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq took over the town of Sinjar from the extremists, cutting off a main route from Raqqa to IS holdings in Iraq and making movements of fighters and supplies more difficult. It also has captured towns and villages in the province and is moving south toward the IS stronghold of Shaddadeh.

Col. Talal Sillu, a spokesman for the Syrian Democratic Forces, said although they have not received weapons from the U.S. beyond the one air drop, he is satisfied with the U.S.-led coalition's response to their air-strike requests.

"They are participating with us effectively, and they are helping us in the victory against the Daesh terrorist organization," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. □



Kurdish fighters of the YPG flash victory signs as they sit on their pickup on their way to battle against the Islamic State, near Kezwan mountain, northeast Syria. Drawing on thousands of fighters from Syria's mix of religious and ethnic groups, a U.S.-backed alliance called the Syrian Democratic Forces has emerged as the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State group in Syria. (YPG via AP)

backed alliance called the Syrian Democratic Forces has emerged as the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State group.

But the dominant role of Kurdish fighters in the alliance is a concern for majority Sunni Arab factions and their regional backers, raising questions about the group's future role in a broader political context in Syria.

The coalition, which focuses on fighting the Islamic

has been capturing territory steadily in northern Syria from the extremists, it is hampered greatly by its inability to retake areas with a majority Sunni Arab population.

In a devastated landscape where extremists and Islamic groups largely preside, the Syrian Democratic Forces are the closest thing to an inclusive and moderate fighting force in Syria. It represents the largest of the non-government fighting forces arrayed against

said Kurdish activist Mustafa Bali, speaking from the Kurdish town of Kobani in northern Syria. He said the group has a united command stretching from the predominantly Kurdish town of al-Malikiyah in the east to Afrin in the west, with new members joining the alliance on daily basis. The group is led by the main Kurdish fighting force in Syria, the People's Protection Units, known as the YPG. It seeks to build on the success of the Euphrates Vol-

Islamic State releases video claiming to kill Russian spy

JIM HEINTZ
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Islamic State group on Wednesday released a video in which a Russian-speaking man confesses to spying for Russia's security service and then is shown apparently being beheaded by another Russian-speaking man.

The authenticity of the video or the claims in it could not immediately be confirmed and there was no comment from Russia's

Foreign Ministry or its FSB security service. There was also no indication when and where the video was produced.

Russia on Sept. 30 launched airstrikes in Syria that it says are focused on IS fighters and the illegal oil trade that funds them. However, critics in both Syria and abroad claim that Russia is heavily targeting other rebel groups not affiliated with IS, in order to back up the forces of longtime Moscow ally Syrian President

Bashar Assad.

IS claimed responsibility for bombing a Russian airliner shortly after it took off from the Egyptian resort of Sharm al-Sheikh in mid-October, killing all 224 people aboard.

The video begins with a graphic in Arabic and Russian, saying "You will be conquered and humiliated, O Russians."

Then a bearded man appearing to be in his late 20s is shown speaking from a chair. He says he

is from Chechnya, identifies himself as Magomed Khasayev and says he is a spy sent to IS-held territories with orders from Russian intelligence to identify fighters who seek to return to the Caucasus region to carry out attacks.

He says he was pressured into working for the FSB, to report on Russians who had gone to fight with the Islamic State. He says he traveled to Turkey and then was sent by an IS recruiter to Iraq, and had contacts

with his Russian intelligence handler, but was arrested by IS.

The video then shifts to showing the man kneeling on a beach while another man stands behind him, delivering a speech to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The man, brandishing a knife, says in Russian, "Listen to me, Putin, you dog" and declaring that Russians will be killed in retaliation for Russia's airstrikes in Syria against IS. □



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Chinese president Xi visiting South Africa to discuss trade

LYNSEY CHUTEL
Associated Press

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) — Welcomed by a military band and a guard of honor, Chinese President Xi Jinping began a state visit to South Africa on Wednesday, part of China's effort to strengthen economic ties with Africa.

The Chinese government became Africa's largest international trading partner in 2009, according to the South African Institute of International Affairs. Trade was valued at over \$201 billion last year, a sharp rise from just \$10.6 billion in 2000. This is Xi's second visit to the country — the first was in 2013 when the Chinese president toured several African states.

Xi met his South African counterpart President Jacob Zuma in an official ceremony in the capital Pretoria. After the red carpet procession, each president was flanked by row of cabinet ministers, who were part of the talks on issues such as financial cooperation and infrastructure projects. Xi's visit comes ahead of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation, a meeting that brings together African and Chinese leaders every three years. The two leaders watched as cabinet ministers and industry leaders signed 26 bilateral agreements worth about \$6.5 billion, that include a \$500 million loan to Eskom, South Africa's struggling national power supplier, according to a statement released by the South African government. Xi's visit to South Africa comes a day after meeting Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe in Harare, where the Chinese leader signed deals worth more than \$4 billion, according to Zimbabwean newspapers. In addition to China's mining interests in cash-strapped Zimbabwe, the 12 agreements cover industries such as power and transport, and prevent double taxation for investors, according to the Herald, a state-owned Zimbabwean newspaper. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari is travelling to South Africa this week, where he will also meet Xi, his office said in a statement. The two leaders are to discuss a coastal railway project in Nigeria, which Buhari's government hopes will be financed by a \$12 billion Chinese loan, the statement said. China's economic downturn has had a knock-on effect on African countries that export raw materials to China's once-booming industries. "I think that we're all in the same boat if you're a producer in the global economy," said South Africa's Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davies. "The demand is lower so the prices are lower." Xi may have to spend some time on this trip reassuring African leaders that trade relations will remain strong, said Aubrey Hruby, a Washington D.C.-based economist. The Chinese government is unrivalled in its willingness to fund big infrastructure projects in Africa, although American companies still provide the highest foreign direct investment to African countries, she said. □



Russian top military officials speak to the media in front of an aerial images of what they say are oil trucks near Turkey's border with Syria is displayed by the Russian Defense Ministry at a briefing in Moscow, Russia, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. (Vadim Savitsky/ Russian DMPS via AP)

Russia:

Turkey president benefits from IS oil trade

V. ISACHENKOV
M. HADJICOSTIS
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Sharply raising the stakes in Moscow's spat with Ankara, Russia's top military brass on Wednesday accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his family of personally profiting from oil trade with Islamic State militants. The bluntly-worded accusations follow Turkey's downing of a Russian warplane at the Syrian border last week, the first time a NATO member shot down a Russian aircraft in more than half a century. The fierce personal attack on Erdogan reflects the Kremlin's anger and signals that Russia-Turkey tensions will likely continue to escalate. The Russian Defense Ministry invited dozens of foreign military attaches and hundreds of journalists to produce what they said were satellite and aerial images of thousands of oil

trucks streaming from the IS-controlled deposits in Syria and Iraq into Turkish sea ports and refineries.

"The main customer for this oil stolen from Syria and Iraq is Turkey," said Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov. "The top political leadership of the country, President Erdogan and his family, is involved in this criminal business."

The Turkish leader has denied Russian President Vladimir Putin's earlier claims of Turkey's involvement in oil trade with the IS, and has pledged to step down if Moscow proves its accusations.

"No one has the right to make such a slander as to suggest that Turkey buys Daesh's oil. Turkey has not lost its moral values as to buy oil from a terror organization," Erdogan said in Wednesday's speech at Qatar University, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group, shortly after the Russian Defense

Ministry made the claims. "Those who make such slanderous claims are obliged to prove them. If they do I would not remain on the presidential seat for one minute. But those who make the claim must also give up their seat if they can't prove it."

The Russian plane's downing has badly strained the relationship between the two nations that had earlier developed close economic ties. Russia has responded by deploying long-range air defense missiles at its air base in Syria and slamming Turkey with an array of economic sanctions.

Erdogan warned Wednesday that "if Russia's disproportionate reactions continue, we will be forced to take our own measures."

Antonov, meanwhile, said that IS militants make \$2 billion a year from the illegal oil trade, and he squarely put the personal blame on Erdogan. □

Argentine president-elect criticizes outgoing president

PETER PRENGAMAN

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina

(AP) — Argentine politics had the feel of a school food fight on Wednesday, with President-elect Mauri-

garden in Buenos Aires. "Each thing that she thinks is hurting our government is hurting all Argentines." Last week, Macri said a private meeting with Fernandez was a waste of

to make up a shortfall of more than \$10 billion owed to a handful of provincial governments with funds from the office that runs the country's pension plans — a move that will

change locations," said Fernandez. "It appears that somebody is being whimsical."

The constitution establishes that the swearing in of the president and vice president will happen in Congress, but does not specify where the outgoing leader will hand over the presidential gear to the next head of state.

The fights come after a bruising election that included a primary in August, a first round in October and then a runoff in November. They also come at a time of major transition in the South American nation of 41 million.

For 12 years, Fernandez and late husband and former President Nestor Kirchner dominated the political landscape. They spent heavily on social welfare programs for the poor, passed laws such as legalizing gay marriage, raised tariffs to protect local industries and greatly increased the size of government and its role in society.

Macri, a conservative who ran on free-market ideas, promised to undo many of those policies while combating corruption and myriad economic problems, like inflation near 30 percent, near-zero growth the last several years and byzantine controls on the buying of U.S. dollars that has created a booming black market.

"Cristina is going to use her power up to the last minute," said Ricardo Rouvier, director of Rouvier and Associates, a political consulting firm. "This isn't going to be a simple change of administration." □



Argentina's President-elect Mauricio Macri points as he arrives to present members of his new cabinet at the botanical gardens in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. Macri will take office on Dec. 10.

(AP Photo/Ricardo Mazalan)

cio Macri accusing outgoing President Fernandez of shenanigans ahead of his inauguration next week while a top Fernandez administration official said Macri was being "whimsical."

It was the latest of several spats between the leaders since Macri beat out Fernandez's chosen successor in the Nov. 22 presidential election.

"Instead of going out the front door, (Fernandez) is going out the back door," Macri said while presenting his future Cabinet members at a botanical

time, accusing Fernandez of stonewalling about the state of the budget and other issues related to the transition.

In the last week, the two sides have also argued about who is to blame for increasing inflation since the election, dozens of bills that Fernandez is pushing through Congress and her decision to ramp up spending on salaries and subsidies while appointing several last-minute ambassadors.

On Wednesday, Macri criticized the president for ordering the treasury

add to the country's ballooning deficit.

Macri also talked about a growing logistics spat related to the Dec. 10 inaugural ceremony. Macri said he wanted his swearing-in to be in Congress in front of lawmakers. He would then go to the government house, called the Casa Rosada, where Macri said Fernandez could pass the presidential staff and sash.

However, Cabinet chief Anibal Fernandez said that the president would do the transfer in Congress.

"It doesn't make sense to

LATIN BRIEFS

Colombian police discover 4 bodies near tourist area

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP)

— Police in Colombia's capital have recovered the remains of four women whose bodies were dumped near a pilgrimage site that is one of the city's most-emblematic tourist spots. Police announced the grisly discovery on Tuesday and said a homeless man has confessed to murdering the women. The suspect has been dubbed the "Monster of Monserrate" for the church-topped mountain where he built a makeshift camp and drug den on an empty lot amid heavy forest. Police Gen. Humberto Guatibonza said authorities are searching the area for more bodies. The suspect has told authorities he killed seven women but only four bodies have been found, police said. Monserrate is one of Bogota's most-visited sites for its panoramic views of the city accessible by cable cars. It's also a major devotional site.

Coke pulls Mexico ad seen offending indigenous groups

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A Co-

ca-Cola Mexico spokesman says the company apologizes and has pulled an online ad after it was deemed offensive to the country's indigenous by consumers, media and advocacy groups. Director of Publicity Diego Bracamontes says the ad was pulled late Tuesday after about a week online in Mexico, and that the company never meant to offend anyone. The "Open Your Heart" holiday campaign came under fire with its portrayal of festive, fashion-model-looking white people driving into the remote hills of Oaxaca to haul Coke and a Christmas tree as a service project for the indigenous Mixe community of Totontepec Villa de Morelos. □

Venezuela leader Maduro threatens to jail Heinz

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro is threatening to jail managers of the local subsidiary for Kraft Heinz, accusing them of possible economic sabotage.

Maduro said early Wednesday that the company was

purposefully trying to sow discontent by paralyzing production lines. He said the country's intelligence police would not hesitate to arrest executives.

The South American country has been grappling with severe shortages for years.

Maduro's ruling socialist party faces its stiffest electoral challenge in more than a decade on Sunday. The socialists are expected to lose control of the National Assembly.

Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chavez made it a habit to single out for-

eign corporations for criticism, including McDonald's, Clorox Co. and Hilton Worldwide.

Alimentos Heinz is a subsidiary of Kraft Heinz Company, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Northfield, Illinois. It declined to comment. □



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Cuba imposes travel permit for doctors to limit brain drain

M. WEISSENSTEIN
A. RODRIGUEZ
Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The Cuban government announced this week that it is re-imposing a hated travel permit requirement on many doctors, requiring them to get permission to leave the country in an attempt to counter a brain drain that it blames on the United States.

It is the first major retreat in Cuba's policy of allowing unrestricted travel for its citizens, put in place in 2013 as President Raul Castro allowed new freedoms as part of a broad set of social and economic reforms. The announcement set off waves of anger and worry among Cuban doctors and nurses, members of one of the country's most respected and economically important professions. By midday, many Cuban doctors were trying to figure out whether quitting their jobs would free them of the travel limit.

"Instead of resolving the real problems of Cuban doctors, which is that salaries are low and we are working with limited resources, this measure shows that there's no respect for the rights of citizens in Cuba," said Dr. Eduardo Herrera, a surgeon at Calixto Garcia Hospital in Havana's Vedado neighborhood.

The government announced on the front page of state media that health professionals in specialties that have been drained by large-scale emigration in recent years will now be required to get permission from Health Ministry officials in order to leave the country. The measure potentially affects one-tenth of the country's work force, leaving very few families in



Doctors parade in the May Day march in Havana, Cuba. The Cuban government announced on the front page of state media this week that doctors in specialties that have been drained by large-scale emigration in recent years will now be required to get permission from Health Ministry officials in order to leave the country.
(AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Cuba untouched. The Cuban government cites free, universal health care system as one of the crowning achievements of its socialist revolution. Medical missions abroad are one of the most important sources of foreign exchange for the Cuban government, which receives tens of thousands of dollars a year in cash

or commodities for each doctor it sends overseas. Official statistics show that 500,000 of the country's 5 million workers are health professionals. The new policy was announced hours after a meeting Monday between U.S. and Cuban negotiators in Washington to address a crisis in Cuban migration, which has

reached its highest levels in at least two decades this year. Cuba complained that the U.S. said it had no plans to change Cold War-era policies that give automatic legal residency to Cuban immigrants. Like Herrera, many Cuban doctors cite low pay, poor working conditions and the possibility of well-compensated jobs in other

countries as their primary reasons for emigrating. The Cuban government places the blame on the U.S. policy of granting automatic legal residency to Cuban immigrants, with special fast-track benefits for doctors who abandon government medical missions overseas. The government has raised medical salaries in recent years, but few doctors earn more than \$80 a month, a fraction of what they would earn in medicine in other countries, or even as drivers or waiters in Cuba's booming tourist economy. "The migration of Cuban health professionals is a concern for the country," the government announcement read, blaming U.S. laws that aid Cuban medical emigration for having "the perverse objective of pushing Cuban health professionals to abandon their missions in other countries." Inside Cuba, many doctors and nurses complain that their profession has been devastated by waves of departures, with vital specialists now absent in many clinics and hospitals. □

USVI signs \$800M deal to sell shuttered refinery

CHARLOTTE AMALIE, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) — The U.S. Virgin Islands has signed an \$800 million deal to sell what was once the world's largest oil refinery to a Boston-based equity firm.

The government announced Tuesday that it would receive a \$220 million upfront payment from ArcLight Capital Partners' Limetree Bay Holdings as part of the 25-year deal that is expected to create hundreds of jobs. Gov. Kenneth Mapp said the

HOVENSA oil storage facility in St. Croix would be expanded and a \$6 million asphalt plant would be built. He said the deal requires that 80 percent of all workers be Virgin Islanders. The deal also provides \$30 million to continue clean-up of the site and awards the government 330 acres (134 hectares) of HOVENSA land to build 130 homes and a vocational school. Legislators are scheduled to meet Dec. 17 to debate the deal, which requires their approval.

The refinery closed in early 2012 after years of weak demand and high operating costs, delivering an economic blow to the U.S. territory. Mapp said if the deal is approved, the government would not be forced to borrow money for at least three years since it would receive a minimum of \$7 million a year from Limetree. "These dollars will help balance the budget while we rebuild our economy," he said. The government had filed

a lawsuit against U.S. oil company Hess Corp. in September for more than \$1 million, accusing the firm of abandoning the refinery it had promised to run through 2022. The Hess subsidiary that owns the refinery later announced that it would file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which would allow it to sell the refinery as a storage facility, a move the government tried to prevent. Mapp said the government has since reached a settlement with HOVENSA. □

Program launched to reduce deadly cervical cancer in Haiti

DAVID McFADDEN
Associated Press

ST. MARC, Haiti (AP) — A pilot program was launched Wednesday to battle deadly cervical cancer in impoverished Haiti, which has the world's highest rate of the preventable disease. Roughly 3,000 Haitian women get cervical cancer each year and about

half of them die from the illness. But pointing to successes in developing countries in Africa and Asia, physicians say improvements in cervical cancer prevention, screening and treatment can have a big impact in protecting girls and women in this hemisphere's poorest nation. Expectations are that the two-year initiative

launched by Zanmi Lasante, the Haitian program of the Boston-based non-profit Partners in Health, will screen 20,000 women for cervical cancer and vaccinate some 6,000 girls against the strains of human papillomavirus that most commonly cause the illness. Prevention activities will also reach roughly 60,000.

Dr. Jacklin St. Fleur, medical director of St. Nicolas Hospital in St. Marc, a commune in western Haiti where the pilot program will be focused, said he hopes the political will is there to expand the cervical cancer effort into a nationwide effort. In recent years, the Haitian doctor directed a national cervical cancer prevention pro-

gram in Rwanda. "This is a preventable disease. If we work hard and educate our girls and women we can prevent it," St. Fleur said after giving U.S. Ambassador Peter Mulrean a tour of the hospital, the primary hospital for Haiti's Artibonite region. The U.S. Agency for International Development is supporting the program. □

Suriname high court says president's murder trial to resume



Suriname President Desire Delano Bouterse observes a military parade in Paramaribo, Suriname. The high court in Suriname says the trial of Bouterse in the killings of 15 political opponents in 1982 must resume despite the adoption of an amnesty law in the South American country.

(AP Photo/Ertugrul Kilic)

PIETER VAN MAELE
Associated Press

PARAMARIBO, Suriname (AP) — A trial of President Desi Bouterse in the killings of 15 political opponents in 1982 must resume despite an amnesty law, the high

court in the South American country has ruled. The Court of Justice agreed with a challenge to the applicability of the amnesty law filed by relatives of the slain opponents and it directed the attorney

general to resume proceedings. The plaintiffs announced the verdict late Tuesday. The ruling was issued Nov. 27 but not publicly released. "Our belief in the rule of law in Suriname has been

restored," said Hugo Eshed, a lawyer for several of the relatives who filed the challenge. "We expect the attorney general to accurately follow the instructions he now has been given by the Court of Justice."

Bouterse and 25 allies from his time as a military dictator in the 1980s avoided trial until November 2007 on charges stemming from the abduction and summary execution of 15 prominent political opponents, an event known locally as the "December killings" that stunned the lightly populated nation on the northern tip of South America.

The former strongman returned to power in 2010 when he was elected president by parliament. Two years later, lawmakers passed an amnesty law and proceedings were put on hold in a decision that outraged human rights activists.

Bouterse, who was re-elected by parliament earlier this year, has accepted what he called "political responsibility" for the killing by the military of the well-

known journalists, lawyers and union leaders but said he was not present when the executions took place. Witnesses in the trial have disputed that claim.

Prosecutors argued that they could not resume the trial without a ruling from a Constitutional Court on whether the amnesty law amounted to a breach of the constitution. But the country has not had an active Constitutional Court since gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1975.

The Court of Justice said in its Nov. 27 ruling that it has the authority to instruct the attorney general to carry on with the case without a ruling from the Constitutional Court, and did so. The acting attorney general, who is appointed by the president, has not said how he will respond to the court order.

The cabinet office of the president declined comment. Irvin Kanhai, the lawyer of Desi Bouterse, told The Associated Press only that he will "discuss the new situation" with his client. □

Dominican cardinal calls gay US official a 'wife' in spat

PANKY CORCINO
Associated Press

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP) — A Dominican cardinal upset over comments that the U.S. ambassador made about corruption in his country has said the openly gay diplomat should focus on homemaking. Cardinal Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez spoke out

against U.S. ambassador James "Wally" Brewster in a meeting with reporters late Tuesday following a Mass. "That man needs to go back to his embassy," he said. "Let him focus on housework, since he's the wife to a man."

Lopez also accused Brewster of promoting a gay rights agenda on Dominican soil. The U.S. Embassy

declined comment, but said Brewster would appear on a local TV news program on Thursday. Brewster became the seventh U.S. ambassador in history to be openly gay when appointed two years ago. Lopez's comments come about a week after Brewster criticized corruption in the Dominican Republic and accused po-

lice officers of threatening and assaulting several U.S. investors who were attending conference organized by the local government. "Imagine the horror I felt when I got a call from one of them, telling me they had been stopped by a uniformed police officer, that they had a weapon pointed at them and that they were forced to turn

over their wallets," Brewster said last week.

Lopez also criticized Brewster for saying that those who feel the U.S. embassy is too involved in Dominican affairs should return their U.S. visa. He said he would be honored and satisfied to do so.

"I couldn't care less," Lopez said. "I'm not interested in traveling." □



As Part of the World's Largest Chanukah Observance, Nine-Foot Menorah to Light Up Aruba!

--This Chanukah, Jewish Community commemorates once-every-seven-years tradition.

PALM BEACH - Chabad Aruba will ignite a public 9 foot menorah erected at the Playa Linda Plaza, followed by a community-wide celebration on the last night of Chanukah, which falls out on December 13th. Following the menorah lighting ceremony, participants will enjoy hot latkes and delicious jelly donuts, a variety of children's activities with music and entertainment for all the family.

The public menorah lighting was organized by Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi Ahron Blasberg, who remarked, "The Menorah serves as a symbol of Aruba's dedication to preserve and encourage the right and liberty of all its citizens to worship G-d freely, openly, and with pride."

Aruba's menorah is one of thousands of large public menorahs sponsored by Chabad throughout the world, helping children and adults of all walks of life discover and enjoy the holiday message.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, recalls the victory more than 2,000 years ago of a militarily weak but spiritually strong Jewish people, over the mighty forces of a ruthless enemy that had overrun ancient Israel and sought to impose restrictions on the Jewish way of life, prohibit religious freedom and force the Jewish people to accept a foreign religion. During the occupation of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Syrian Greeks desecrated and defiled the oils prepared for the lighting of the Menorah,

which was part of the daily service in the temple, and rendered them unfit for use. Upon recapturing the Temple, the Jewish people found one lone jar of undefiled oil, enough to burn only one day, but it lasted miraculously for eight days until new, pure olive oil was produced. Ever since, in commemoration of this event, the Jewish people celebrate Chanukah for eight days by lighting an eight-branched candelabra known as a Menorah. The Menorah is placed on a window or a doorpost facing the outside in order to publicize the miracle, with its message of hope and religious freedom, to all. Today, to people of all faiths, the Chanukah holiday serves as a symbol and message of the triumph of freedom over oppression, of spirit over matter, of light over darkness.



This year's Chanukah celebrations bring added significance as Jewish communities worldwide celebrate the year of Hakhel, a once-every-seven-years opportunity to celebrate

Jewish unity and learning. Throughout the year, Jewish synagogues and organizations are hosting communal gatherings for men, women and children dedicated to encouraging

Jewish observance. Over the eight nights of Chanukah, Chabad Aruba will be organizing numerous Menorah lighting ceremonies all over the Island. The first candle on

December 6th, will be lit at the Hilton Aruba Resort at 5.30pm. At each event, which is listed on our website www.JewishAruba.com/Chanukah2015, hot latkes and donuts will be served. All are welcome.

EVENT RECAP:

What: Grand Chanukah Party
Where: Playa Linda Plaza
When: December 13th 6pm
All welcome

ABOUT CHABAD ARUBA:

Chabad Aruba offers Jewish education, outreach and social service programming for families and individuals of all ages, backgrounds and affiliations. For more information, contact Rabbi Ahron Blasberg at 592-7613 and Rabbi@JewishAruba.com or visit www.JewishAruba.com

Loyal Visitors Honored at the Hilton Aruba Resort

EAGLE BEACH - Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure of honoring a group of loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba at the Hilton Aruba Resort as Distinguished Visitors. The symbolic honorary title is presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for 10-to-19 consecutive years. The honorees were Mr. Richard and Mrs. Nancy Makara of Stamford, Connecticut. Richard and Nancy are loyal guests of the Hilton Aruba Resort and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restau-



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rants, the Casinos, and just about everything else! They say Aruba feels like a second home where the people are like family to them, and the Hilton Aruba Resort is truly their 'home-away-from-home.' The certificates were pre-

sented by Mrs. Darline S. de Cuba representing the Aruba Tourism Authority together with General Manager Mr. Olivier Maumaire, Front Office Manager Mrs. Germaine Wever and MOD Tasha Agana of the Hilton Aruba Resort. □



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Happy Faces of the Wyatt Family at Tango Argentine Grill



PALM BEACH - Hello, Wyatt family from Chicago, Illinois! These happy smiles came to us from Tango

Argentine Grill in the Arawak Garden. No wonder the Wyatts are so cheerful: they had the extraordinary filet mignon, listened to the live music and finished off their evening with Tango crepes and chocolate cake.

This is the third visit from the Wyatt family in as many

years; now, however they are in full strength as everyone joined in. Loving Aruba, the Wyatts are on their sixth trip - they are especially fond of Tango Restaurant, as the food is wonderful and the service really friendly.

The Arawak Garden is a small plaza located across

from the Occidental Resort on the hi-rise strip. It is the home of several great restaurants and small kiosks selling souvenirs and much more. Nightly live music and famous The Sopranos Piano bar are just two of the draws that pull many visitors to the Garden. □

Aruba Tourism Authority attends Airline Meetings in Chile

SANTIAGO/ORANJES-

TAD - An Aruba delegation recently met in Santiago, Chile, with LATAM (Latin America's largest airline group serving Aruba since 2013), PR agencies, and the Digital department of the Aruba Tourism Authority.

The agenda included proposed new programs for 2016 and the planning of flights to optimize connections within Latin America. The main markets in Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile were discussed, as well as new markets such as Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

Present were Juan Francisco Almeida, manager of route economics/LATAM; Carmen Gloria Alonso, manager of



global tourism destinations and alliance/ LAN Airlines, and David Moreno, analyst for Caribbean Routes.

A.T.A.'s Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes, CEO, and Sanju Luidens-Daryanani, CMO, were joined by Jo-Anne Ar-

ends, head of Airline Marketing for the Aruba Airport Authority; Miriam Dabian, director for ATA Latin

America; Maria Victoria Galan with ATA Colombia, and Alvaro Caballero with ATA Peru and Chile. □

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Driftwood Restaurant. This authentic Aruban seafood restaurant is located in characteristic downtown Oranjestad. Their

extended menu has been jubled by many. Driftwood offers daily specials, as well as a delicious 4-course menu for just \$25.95 **Charter deep sea fishing rates:** \$400 - 1/2 day • \$760 - full day. Rates per boat Max. 6 people. **Driftwood Restaurant** Authentic Aruban Seafood Restaurant; Klipstraat #12, Downtown Oranjestad. Tel: (297) 583 2515 www.driftwoodaruba.com Open hours: every day, from 5pm till 10:30pm. Sunday Closed.

Bryant Scores 31 to Lead Lakers Past Wizards 108-104

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**ROARING
20**

Curry scores 40, Warriors Top Hornets 116-99 to Go 20-0

Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, left, drives past Charlotte Hornets guard Kemba Walker in the second half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015 in Charlotte, N.C. Curry scored 40 points in three quarters and the Warriors defeated the Hornets 116-99 to extend the best start in NBA history to 20-0.

(AP Photo/Nell Redmond)

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In the pits: US Grand Prix “subject to agreement” in 2016

JIM VERTUNO
AP Sports Writer

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The future of the struggling U.S. Grand Prix was thrown into further doubt Wednesday when the 2016 Formula One calendar listed the race as “subject to agreement” with the promoter.

Officials at the Circuit of the Americas have said they are financially strapped after storms wiped out much of the 2015 race weekend and by news the Texas governor’s office is cutting public funding by about 20 percent.

The 2016 race calendar released by the FIA’s World Motor Sport Council still has the race scheduled for Oct. 23 but with an asterisk. “The USA’s slot remains provisional,” the FIA said.

Track officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Other items of note from the FIA:

stone plan to present “conclusions” by Jan. 31.

— If the U.S. Grand Prix is held, the 2016 calendar will have a record 21 races, including a return to Germany at Hockenheim and the addition of the European Grand Prix in Azerbaijan. The previous high was 20 races in 2012.

The U.S. Grand Prix has been considered a major opportunity for Formula One to surge into a largely untapped market.

The \$300 million track was built to host the race, which has run in Austin since 2012. Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton has won three times, including this year to clinch this third Formula One championship.

The private investors who built the track, including hedge fund manager Bobby Epstein and billionaire businessman Red McCombs, said they were promised significant help from the state to pay for

to Ecclestone notes the state portion could be less than \$25 million for the rest of the contract. The letter says that if tax revenues fall short, promoters must make up the difference. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s office told track officials they will get about \$19.5 million from the state for the next race because the formula used to award grants were changed to make them more restrictive.

Combined with local tax revenue, race officials will still get about \$23 million in public funds. An Abbott spokeswoman said the numbers were not expected to change, but declined comment on the future of the race.

Austin Mayor Steve Adler has called the race an important event for the Texas capital. But he also has told track officials they can’t look to the city for a “bail-out.”

“There is no change in my



Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton, of Britain, races during the Formula One U.S. Grand Prix auto race in Austin, Texas. The future of the struggling U.S. Grand Prix was thrown into further doubt Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015, when the 2016 Formula One calendar listed the race as “subject to agreement” with the promoter.

(AP Photo/Eric Gay)

— FIA President Jean Todt and Formula One commercial chief Bernie Ecclestone were given a “mandate to make recommendations and decisions regarding a number of pressing issues.” Formula One has grappled with complaints over the sport’s governance, engines, and rising costs of racing. The FIA statement said Todt and Eccle-

stone plan to hold the race over a 10-year deal. Under an agreement reached with former Gov. Rick Perry and former Comptroller Susan Combs, Texas gave \$25 million from the state’s Major Events Trust fund in the first year. Promoters said they were counting on that money every year. But a 2010 letter from Perry and Combs

position, and promoters have not asked us for financial help,” Adler said. Track officials have said the event has pumped “hundreds of millions” of dollars into the Austin and Texas economies since 2012 and applied for state funding under the same formula as Super Bowls, NCAA basketball tournaments and other events. □



Bode Miller navigates the course as a forerunner prior to a training run for competitors in the Men’s World Cup downhill skiing event in Beaver Creek, Colo., Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015.

(AP Photo/Nathan Bilow)

Bode Miller takes the course as forerunner before training run

PAT GRAHAM
AP Sports Writer
BEAVER CREEK, Colo. (AP) — Bode Miller glided

around a turn at a high rate of speed, caught some air and nearly lost one of his skis. Somehow, as he always seems to do, he avoided a crash and kept right on attacking the course.

And this was just a training run — with nothing at stake. Miller being Miller, he of course charged through a daunting downhill Wednesday, even if he was simply testing out the race hill.

Although he’s taking a break from World Cup racing this season, the 38-year-old Miller served as a forerunner in Beaver Creek for one day only and wore a camera mounted to his ski pole. The six-time Olympic medalist even safely brought back the camera — barely.

Because Miller’s version of playing it safe is a relative term. He appeared nearly as fast as ever in his return to a venue where he wiped out last February during a world championship super-G race and severed his right hamstring tendon.

“I couldn’t go as fast as I wanted today,” said Miller, who didn’t have an official time in a training run where Norway’s Kjetil Jansrud got down the mountain the quickest. “But I might make a career out of being a professional forerunner, so I can run a buff course all the time.”

“I know how to take risks. I’m better at managing risk than anyone else on the World Cup.”

No denying that. He’s won 33 World Cup races and two overall titles with his risk-taking style.

While this was just a friendly meander down the Birds of Prey hill, he still wanted to see how he stacked up wearing new skis from Bomber, a company he’s now collaborating with after a split from Head.

He charged, too. That is, until he hit some tiny ripples and almost wiped out. Then, he backed off a bit.

“I can’t go out there and go crazy, because I’m not in that kind of form yet,” Miller said.

When he passed the spot where he crashed last February, he wasn’t intimidated. Didn’t even give it a second thought.

“Because I’ve come back to places a lot of times where I’ve crashed,” said Miller, who will also serve as a commentator for the races this week, beginning Friday with a downhill. “I’m not too worried about it. That was a freak accident.” U.S. men’s coach Sasha Rearick was pleased that Miller returned. This could be a glimpse of things to come.

“I’d love to have him back and throwing down,” Rearick said. “It’s good for the sport, good for the team and good for him. Having him come to the big events is good for everybody.” □

Wladimir Klitschko set for rematch with Tyson Fury: report

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— Wladimir Klitschko has invoked a contract clause calling for a rematch with Tyson Fury in an attempt to regain the heavyweight title he lost to the British fighter.

Fury took away Klitschko's four titles in a stunning unanimous decision in Duesseldorf on Saturday night, ending the Ukrainian's 9 1/2-year reign as champion.

"It's fantastic news, we are ecstatic," said Peter Fury, the uncle and trainer of the new champion.

Fury is obliged contractually to accept a rematch, he said. Peter Fury suggested holding the new fight in England, possibly at Wembley Stadium.

Fury took Klitschko's WBA, IBF, and WBO heavyweight belts, as well as the minor IBO title. Klitschko had been unbeaten since April 2004. "I was really frustrated directly after the fight but after some short nights I now know that I want to show that I am much better than my performance on Saturday," Klitschko said in announcing plans for the rematch.

"I couldn't show my full potential at any time. This is what I want to change in the rematch — and I will. Failure is not an option."

Klitschko's management team says it will get in touch with Fury's promoter to set the venue and date for the rematch.

"There will be a huge worldwide interest in this fight which already can be billed as the fight of the year 2016," said Klitschko's manager Bernd Boente.

Klitschko turns 40 in March. Fury is 27 and 2.09 meters (6-foot-9) tall.

Klitschko, who is 1.98-meters (6-foot-6), was in the unusual position of facing someone taller. Fury, who weighed in at 112 kilograms (247 pounds) also had half-kilo (1.1 pound) weight advantage for the fight.

The Ukrainian dropped to 64-4, with 53 KOs, while Fury improved to 25-0, with 18 KOs. □

Bryant scores 31 to lead Lakers past Wizards 108-104

IAN QUILLEN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kobe Bryant scored 12 of his season-high 31 points in the fourth quarter of his final game in Washington to help the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Wizards 108-104 on Wednesday night.

Julius Randle had 15 points and a career-best 19 rebounds for the Lakers (3-15), who snapped a seven-game losing streak. Jordan Clarkson added 18 points as Los Angeles finished a stretch of four games in five days.

Bryant played 36 minutes in his second game since announcing his plans to retire after this season, his 20th in the NBA. He left the Verizon Center floor to thunderous applause from what remained from a crowd of 20,356, Washington's third sellout of the season.

The night before, Bryant opened the first leg of his farewell tour in his hometown of Philadelphia, where the Lakers lost to the

previously winless 76ers. Bryant played nearly 32 minutes and scored 20 points on 7-of-26 shooting.

John Wall had 34 points and had 11 assists for Washington, which lost a day after beating LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers on the road.

Marcin Gortat added 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Wizards, who have dropped four of five despite erasing an early 19-point deficit.

Bryant started 5 for 9 from the floor. Then he missed his next six shots before regaining his rhythm in the fourth quarter, each made shot drawing a louder roar from an even mix of Wizards and Lakers fans.

His 3-pointer over Gortat from the right wing made it 101-99 with just under a minute to play.

Gortat answered with a layup off Wall's feed, but Bryant's pull-up jumper over a badly fooled Bradley Beal made it 103-101 with 30.8 seconds remaining. □



Los Angeles Lakers forward Kobe Bryant (24) shoots against Washington Wizards guard Garrett Temple, left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015, in Washington.

(AP Photo/Nick Wass)

Curry scores 40, Warriors top Hornets 116-99, go 20-0



CHARLOTTE, North Carolina (AP) — Stephen Curry scored 40 points in three quarters as the Golden State Warriors defeated the Charlotte Hornets 116-99 on Wednesday night to extend the best start in NBA history to 20-0.

On a night when the Hornets honored Curry's father, Dell, the franchise's career scoring leader, it was his oldest son who stole the spotlight by hitting 14 of 18 shots from the field and going 8 for 11 from 3-point range.

Stephen Curry, who grew up in Charlotte, scored 28 points in the pivotal third quarter. He hit 10 of 11 shots from the field, including all five 3s — many from well beyond the arc and in

the face of a defender — to help the Warriors build a 21-point lead. The reigning MVP sat out the entire fourth quarter due to the big lead. Nicolas Batum led Charlotte with 17 points and eight rebounds. Klay Thompson had 15 of his 21 points in the first quarter as the Warriors bolted to an early 15-point lead. Despite missing the inside presence of center Al Jefferson — out at least two weeks with a strained left calf — and 0-for-8 shooting from Kemba Walker in the first half, the Hornets rallied to cut the lead to 60-51 at the break. But midway through the third quarter Curry got rolling, launching deep 3-pointers, several times turning and jogging back down court well before the ball even went through the net. It marked the fourth time this season Curry has scored 40 points by the end of the third quarter. □

Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, left, drives to the basket against Charlotte Hornets forward Spencer Hawes to score in the second half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015 in Charlotte, N.C. Golden State won 116-99.

(AP Photo/Nell Redmond)

On The Sideline:

Panthers handling talk of unbeaten season in stride

STEVE REED

AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina (AP) — The Carolina Panthers are the NFL's sole unbeaten side at 11-0 following the New England Patriots loss on Sunday.

Now the focus is solely on the Panthers. Talk of an unbeaten season has begun to permeate the team's locker room, with players being peppered with more questions after each victory about matching the 1972 Miami Dolphins as the NFL's only unblemished team.

Rather than fight it, some Panthers are just enjoying the ride. "Hey, winning is fun, it's very fun," veteran center Ryan Kalil said. "As far as the undefeated stuff, all I know is it's really hard to win every week."

But not impossible, safety Roman Harper said. "Why can't we?" Harper asked, of going 19-0. "We just have to don't worry about it, and when we get there, we get there."

Added defensive tackle Dwan Edwards: "The way our team is playing it's going to take us to not play well on a Sunday for a team to beat us." Carolina's schedule certainly lends itself to a possible run at perfection. The Panthers travel to New Orleans on Sunday before finishing the season with a home-and-away series with slumping Atlanta, at the New York Giants, and at home against Tampa Bay.

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Carolina Panthers' Derek Anderson (3) and Joe Webb (14) celebrate with Cam Newton (1) after Newton scored a touchdown on a running play during the second half of an NFL football game against the Dallas Cowboys, Thursday, Nov. 26, 2015, in Arlington, Texas.

(AP Photo/Michael Ainsworth)

None of those teams are particularly playing well. The Saints have lost four straight games, the Falcons three, and the Giants two. The Buccaneers are probably playing the best of their remaining foes having won three of their last five, but they too lost last weekend 25-12 to Indianapolis.

Quarterback Cam Newton said his approach was to remain focused on the Saints, a team the Panthers beat 27-22 at home without Drew Brees in September.

"We aren't trying to get lured in by what others may think," Newton said of a potentially perfect season.

"Our main focus — and we are already reminded by what coach (Ron) Rivera says — is to become 12-0 first." The Panthers, who haven't lost a regular season game in more than a full year, returned to practice on Tuesday for the first time since a dominating 33-14 win over the Dallas Cowboys last Thursday.

Carolina has the third most points in the NFL and given up the third fewest. Yet, Rivera has kept his players focused by reminding them they haven't played a complete game yet.

Rivera has an extra carrot to dangle in front of

his players this week: If the Panthers beat the Saints, they'll clinch their third straight NFC South championship.

In some respects, it seems a foregone conclusion, but when you're looking to keep a team from looking too far ahead anything helps.

"If you start talking about undefeated seasons and trips to the Super Bowl you're not focusing on the details of what you're doing and who we have to play next," Rivera said. "... Our message here is very clear — we have a ways to go and a lot of things to improve upon."

Rivera was a linebacker for the 1985 Super Bowl champion Chicago Bears, a team that started 12-0 before suffering its only loss of the season.

The coach said losing that Dec. 2, 1985 game to the Dolphins on a Monday night was actually a good thing for the Bears.

"The Miami loss refocused us," Rivera said. "It was (good) at the time for us. Could we have been a good undefeated team, yeah, the '85 team might have been. But we'll never know."

He doesn't know if a loss would be good for the Panthers or not.

Right now, the word losing simply isn't one that is being tossed around a Panthers locker room that has suddenly been swarmed by national media attention. □

ON DECK

Red Sox, D. Price agree to a \$217M, seven year deal

BOSTON (AP) — The Boston Red Sox and ace pitcher David Price have agreed to a deal worth \$217 million over seven years, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Tuesday night because the deal has not yet been signed and is pending a physical. Price has a 3.09 ERA in eight major league seasons with 1,372 strikeouts and 104 wins. The left-hander was traded from Detroit to Toronto last season as the Blue Jays made a playoff push in the AL East. One year earlier, he was traded to Detroit from Tampa Bay, where he spent the early part of his career.

Price is a serious upgrade for the Red Sox pitching staff, which struggled last season as Boston finished 78-84, last in the division.

LA Angels sign up Venezuelan minor league OF Ortega

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Outfielder Rafael Ortega has agreed to a one-year contract with the Los Angeles Angels.

Ortega gets a \$525,000 salary in the major leagues and a \$175,000 in the minors under the deal announced Tuesday.

He spent last season with the St. Louis Cardinals' Triple-A affiliate in Memphis, batting .286 with two homers and 42 RBIs. The Venezuelan also led all PCL outfielders with 15 assists.

Ortega has spent eight seasons in the minors, including his first six years in the Colorado system.

He made his only major league appearances in two games for the Rockies in late 2012. He got a hit at Dodger Stadium in his first career plate appearance, reaching base six times overall. □

NFL owners set LA vote meeting for mid-January

BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

IRVING, Texas (AP) — NFL owners have punted on allowing teams to move to Los Angeles — at least for five weeks.

The owners on Wednesday set a special meeting to deal with a possible relocation of teams to Los Angeles for Jan. 12-13 in Houston. But Commissioner Roger Goodell admitted there might not even be a vote then.

"It's not a requirement that we vote at that meeting," Goodell said. "There are still a lot of unknowns to make that prediction."

The Rams, Raiders and Chargers are interested in moving to LA, which has not had an NFL franchise since the Rams and Raiders left after the 1994 season. But the 32 owners, 24 of whom are required to OK a franchise relocation, are seeking more information from the cities hoping

to retain their franchises: St. Louis, Oakland and San Diego.

There also is nothing close to a clear consensus on approval of either of the stadium proposals for LA.

Rams owner Stan Kroenke is planning a billion-dollar stadium in Inglewood, California, while the Raiders and Chargers have a joint project in mind for nearby Carson. Kroenke also is willing to share his proposed stadium with either the

Chargers or Raiders.

"All the proposals must be in by the end of December," Giants co-owner Steve Tisch said, adding "it is the strong hope" of the league that the vote on relocation will come out of that meeting.

Colts owner Jimmy Irsay added that getting 24 owners to approve any of the proposals was a difficult chore, but was optimistic a decision would be made in Houston. □

ON THE GREEN

Woods still big presence at his annual golf tournament

DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

NASSAU, Bahamas (AP) — PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem met with Tiger Woods on Wednesday and was happy to see him alive.

"I kidded him because based on media reports I read before I came down here this morning, I thought he was actually dying. 'Tiger, you're supposed to be dead.' I just saw him," Finchem said. "He's alive."

Woods, the tournament host of the Hero World Challenge, got the week off to a sobering start in a press conference Tuesday in which he said he had no idea when his back would be healthy enough for him to do anything more than walk, much less think about playing golf.

He said if his 79 wins on the PGA Tour and 14 majors is all he wins, "I've had a pretty good run." He also said he wants to play again and that anything he achieves beyond what he already has "will be gravy."

It sparked speculation of retirement, or at least the end of a career that golf fans once knew.

Jordan Spieth, who said Woods was a major influence on him as a teenager, didn't see it that way.

"Obviously, it's frustrating for him. You can tell that," Spieth said. "But I think we certainly haven't seen the end of him, even if he does say that if the sun sets on the career now, it's still good. I think we can all read between the lines there, that he's ... I think he's still got some really good years left out of him."

Adam Scott didn't see the press conference and said he can only hope that Woods recovers.

"We don't want Tiger checking out of the game any time soon," Scott said.

Scott first played a practice round with Woods on the Sunday before Woods headed off to Pebble Beach for the 2000 U.S. Open, which he won by 15 shots. Scott once said that round nearly persuaded him not to turn pro. He wonders if the next generation will have any appreciation of Woods at his peak.

"It's hard to explain to Jordan coming out now how he (Woods) was just so much better than everyone at that point," Scott said. "We're all quick to forget that sometimes."

The Australian offered another example of the Tiger effect, this time related to apparel.

"He inspired all of us to play golf like he did, and it was kind of at that point a transition from having a wardrobe full of Shark clothes to Nike swooshes," he said. Finchem said his take in seeing Woods was that he was frustrated by not being able to do anything, which included water sports.

"He's like any of us. He's going stir crazy," Finchem said. "He's kind of matter-of-fact about it. He's kind of a matter-of-fact guy."

PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem said the board has approved a new policy that will require players to compete in new tournaments starting with the 2016-17 season. That doesn't mean adding tournaments to the schedule, rather playing one where they haven't been in the previous four years.

More details were expected later in the week, but Finchem said it would apply more to the younger players. It would not have an effect on lifetime members (Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, Davis Love III, Vijay Singh) or players at the end of their careers, presumably age 45 or older. □

Spieth's big lesson on closing paid off

DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

NASSAU, Bahamas (AP) —

Jordan Spieth ends 2015 with two majors, the No. 1 ranking and no doubts about his ability to close out tournaments.

That wasn't the case at this time a year ago.

Not only was he winless, but Spieth three times had failed to convert at least a share of the 54-hole lead into a trophy, including the Masters and The Players Championship. With two events left on his 2014 schedule, he rallied to win the Australian Open and then went wire-to-wire for a 10-shot victory in the Hero World Challenge at Isleworth.

"I had four or five leads going into weekend in 2014 in the PGA Tour season, and each time you don't come through you wonder what's wrong. Is it me? Is it my game?" he said Wednesday. "And then you hear the noise of, 'He's a good player but he can't close,' and this and that. Whether you try to hear it or not, it still comes in. And that's a tough thing to get over."

Those doubts are gone.

Those two wins at the end of last year served as a springboard to a spectacular season in which Spieth won the Masters and U.S. Open among his five titles, captured the FedEx Cup and its \$10 million bonus, swept all the major awards and showed that he can be tough to beat with the lead.

He was 4-1 this year with at least a share of the lead going into the final round, the exception coming at

the Shell Houston Open when he lost in a playoff.

"It just clicked right at the end of that season to lead into '15," he said. "But it

off a runner-up finish in the Australian Open, and he is helped by some course knowledge. He has had a home in Albany the last



Jordan Spieth speaks during a press conference at the PGA Tour's Hero World Challenge golf tournament in Nassau, Bahamas, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. (AP Photo/Doug Ferguson)

was tough. Those Sunday evenings were tough for me when I didn't close them out. Makes you really appreciate now that you can. You wonder, 'How in the world was I not able to back then?' But it's just the way the game is."

Indeed, it's tougher than ever to win on the PGA Tour. The Hero World Challenge, which starts Thursday at Albany Golf Club, is an example of that.

The 18-man field, which does not include injured host Tiger Woods, consists only of players from the top 50 in the world ranking. And yet there are five of those, including three from the top 20, who have yet to win anywhere around the world this year.

One of them is Adam Scott, at No. 10 in the world, who is trying to avoid his first winless year since his first as a pro in 2000. Scott is coming

four years and holds the course record (65). "Look, winning is getting more difficult, certainly when you have some dominant players," Scott said. "And you had two really dominant players this year in Jordan and Jason (Day) winning five times each. And then the depth of the game of golf is stronger every year at the moment. And just getting one win is tough." This is the fourth location for the World Challenge, which Woods began in 1999 in Arizona. It was at Sherwood Country Club in California until moving to Isleworth in Florida for last year, and now The Bahamas were Woods has property, along with Scott and Justin Rose. The task facing the 22-year-old Spieth is what he does for an encore, though Spieth will have the rest of December to figure that out. □

Song, Feng leading LPGA Tour Qualifier

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP)

— Christine Song and China's Simin Feng each shot 7-under 65 on Wednesday to share the first-round lead in the LPGA Tour Qualifying Tournament.

Song and Feng opened on LPGA International's Jones Course. South Korea's Julie Yang was third after a 66 on the Hills Course, and Cydney Clanton had a 67

on the Jones Course.

The top 20 finishers Sunday will earn full LPGA Tour cards, and Nos. 21-45 and ties will receive conditional status.

Song, from Fullerton, California, made seven starts on the LPGA Tour this year while recovering from a back injury. She also played 11 tournaments on the Symetra Tour.

"I definitely want to be back out there," Song said. "I can play out there and I can win out there and I really want to get back there ASAP."

The 20-year-old Simin birdied four of her final five holes.

"I hit all of the fairways and only missed two greens so that was the key," Feng said. □

Benzema wants to win Euro 2016 with Valbuena

SAMUEL PETREQUIN

AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — Speaking publicly for the first time since becoming embroiled in a blackmail scandal, Karim Benzema said Wednesday he wants to play again for France and win the 2016 European Championship with teammate Mathieu Valbuena. Benzema, one of France's key players, is facing charges of conspiracy to blackmail relating to an extortion scam over a sex tape featuring Valbuena. He is suspected of having played an active role in pressuring Valbuena to deal directly with the blackmailers.

"Hopefully it will end well, we will all be OK ... and we will all return to the France team to win that Euro," Benzema said in an interview with TV channel TF1 to be aired later Wednesday. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls joined in the criticism of Benzema on Tuesday, saying he "has no place" on the national team, days after Valbuena said he felt betrayed by his France teammate.

"I'm not playing for the cameras, I'm not playing a game," insisted Benzema in excerpts released by TF1. "I'm here to be sincere." Benzema's involvement in the plot has not yet been fully determined but investigators believe he was approached by a childhood friend, Karim Zenati, to act as an intermediary

and convince Valbuena to deal directly with the blackmailers. Benzema, who denies any

cerpts of the striker's first examination in front of the investigating judge. "This is absolutely unac-

derstanding," Benzema said he just wanted to "help" Valbuena by letting him know about the



France's Mathieu Valbuena, left, and Karim Benzema, right, chat during a training session in Ribeirao Preto, Brazil. Speaking publicly for the first time since becoming embroiled in a blackmail scandal, Karim Benzema said Wednesday Dec. 2, 2015 he wants to play again for France and win the 2016 European Championship with teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

(AP Photo/David Vincent)

wrongdoing, has also been placed under judicial supervision, meaning he cannot meet with Valbuena during the investigation. If the case continues to drag on until the Euro starts on June 10, France coach Didier Deschamps won't be able to call both players in his squad for the continental tournament.

Meanwhile, Benzema's lawyer Alain Jakubowicz said that he will file a law suit for breach of confidentiality of a judicial investigation after Le Monde newspaper published ex-

ceptable, this case has been turned upside down," Jakubowicz told RTL radio. "Mathieu Valbuena, who is a victim and an honest man, has been influenced in his declarations. But how could it have been different?"

Le Monde published statements given by Benzema to the judge investigating the case after he spent a night in custody at Versailles police station last month. Benzema denied his implication in the plot and told the judge he was a victim of "a big misun-

derstanding," Benzema said he just wanted to "help" Valbuena by letting him know about the sex tape and putting him in touch with his "best friend" Zenati, who is suspected of having played a central role in the scheme and has also been handed preliminary charges.

"I am really disappointed with the magnitude of this story, because blackmail and stuff like that, frankly it's very serious," Benzema was quoted as saying. Benzema also told the judge he thought that Zenati would intervene for free in favor of Valbuena and make sure the tape would be destroyed. □

SOCCKER BRIEFS

Barcelona beats Villanovense 6-1 in Copa del Rey

BARCELONA, Spain (AP)

— A hat trick and an assist by Sandro Ramirez helped Barcelona to a 6-1 win against third-tier Villanovense in their first round, second leg match in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday. After drawing the first leg 0-0, Dani Alves put Barcelona ahead after four minutes with a long shot that goalkeeper Jose Fuentes only got his fingertips to. Fuentes then cleared the ball straight to Ramirez who fired it back over the 'keeper's head in the 21st. Villanovense pulled one back with a shot by Juanfran Guarnido eight minutes later. Ramirez scored again in the 31st and Munir El Haddadi headed in Jeremy Mathieu's cross in the 51st. Ramirez got his third in the 69th and delivered a perfect back-pass for El Haddadi to score again in the 76th. □

Liverpool routs Southampton 6-1 in quarterfinals

SOUTHAMPTON, England (AP)

— Liverpool recovered from conceding inside the first minute to thrash Southampton 6-1 away in the League Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday as Juergen Klopp's impressive start as manager continued. Divock Origi scored a hat trick — his first goals for Liverpool — after fellow striker Daniel Sturridge marked his latest return from injury with goals in the 25th and 29th minutes to spark the comeback. Jordon Ibe also netted as Liverpool reached a record 16th League Cup semifinal, joining Manchester City, Everton and Stoke in the last four. Sadio Mane put Southampton in front at St. Mary's Stadium. Liverpool has won seven of its last eight games under Klopp, who took charge in October, and looks a team unrecognizable from the one that struggled under predecessor Brendan Rodgers. □

Caen fails to close gap on PSG after 1-1 tie at Monaco

JEROME PUGMIRE

AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — Second-place Caen failed to narrow the gap on runaway league leader Paris Saint-Germain after drawing 1-1 at Monaco on Wednesday. Caen had to thank striker Ronny Rodelin for earning a point when he bundled the ball in for an 86th-minute equalizer.

The Normandy side remains 13 points behind PSG, which appears to be coasting to a fourth-straight title despite drop-

ping rare points in Tuesday's 0-0 draw at Angers. A win would have moved Monaco to within one point of Caen, and the Principality side looked well set when striker Guido Carrillo grabbed his first league goal of the season in the 56th. But Monaco remains in sixth place, level on points with seventh-place Saint-Etienne, which lost 1-0 away to struggling Lille. Striker Yassine Benzia scored a spectacular winner for Lille.

Latching onto a long pass

from Marvin Martin, he let the ball drop and hit an arching half-volley from the right of the penalty area into the opposite corner. The strike was somewhat similar to Marco van Basten's stunning goal for the Netherlands against England at the 1988 European Championship.

It was also a much-needed win for Lille, which remains in the relegation zone — one point behind 17th-place Bordeaux.

"We're relieved to win, especially given our situ-

ation," said former Lyon forward Benzia, who was modest about his goal. "Marvin picked me out; I just re-adjusted my balance and managed to score."

Bordeaux coach Willy Sagnol was vague when questioned over his future following Bordeaux's 1-0 defeat at Bastia, which followed last weekend's 4-1 home defeat to Caen.

"The club's in a difficult position," the former France and Bayern Munich right back said. □

TECH NOTES

Publisher planing tech book series for young people

NEW YORK (AP) — Girls Who Code is teaming with Viking Children's Books on a line of at least 11 planned works about computer science and coding. In a joint announcement Wednesday, the tech organization and Viking said the upcoming books would include middle grade fiction, doodles and board books. The initial releases, coming in the summer of 2017, will be "Girls Who Code: Tips, Tricks, and Inspiration for Taking Over Tech" and the start of a fictional series billed as "The Baby-Sitters Club" meets coding. Girls Who Code, founded in 2012 by Reshma Saujani, is a nonprofit with a mission "to close the gender gap in the technology and engineering sectors." Saujani is an activist and former deputy public advocate in New York City. □

Zuckerberg now a dad; to giving away most of his money

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife announced the birth of their daughter Max as well as plans to donate most of their wealth, or roughly \$45 billion, to a new organization that will tackle a broad range of the world's ills. Zuckerberg's wife, Priscilla Chan, gave birth last week to a baby girl. The couple didn't put out the news until Zuckerberg posted it Tuesday on — of course — Facebook. In the same post, Zuckerberg said he and Chan will commit 99 percent of their Facebook stock to such causes as fighting disease, improving education, harnessing clean energy, reducing poverty and promoting equal rights. They are forming a new organization, called the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, to pursue those goals. □

Real World Tech:

How can you take control from a self-driving car?

JUSTIN PRITCHARD
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — New cars that can steer and brake themselves risk lulling people in the driver's seat into a false sense of security — and even to sleep. One way to keep people alert may be providing distractions that are now illegal. That was one surprising finding when researchers put Stanford University students in a simulated self-driving car to study how they reacted when their robochauffeur needed help. The experiment was one in a growing number that assesses how cars can safely hand control back to a person when their self-driving software and sensors are overwhelmed or overmatched. With some models already able to stay in their lane or keep a safe distance from other traffic, and automakers pushing for more automation, the car-to-driver handoff is a big open question.

The elimination of distracted driving is a major selling point for the technology. But in the Stanford experiment, reading or watching a movie helped keep participants awake.

Among the 48 students put in the driver's seat, 13 who were instructed to monitor the car and road began to nod off. Only three did so when told to watch a video or read from a tablet.

Alertness mattered when students needed to grab the wheel because a simulated car or pedestrian got in the way.

There's no consensus on the right car-to-driver handoff approach: the Stanford research suggests engaging people with media could help, while some automakers are marketing vehicles with limited self-driving features that will slow the car if they detect a person has stopped paying attention to the road.

Though research is ongoing, it appears that people need at least 5 seconds to take over — if they're not totally checked out.

Self-driving car experts at Google, which is pursu-

ing the technology more aggressively than any automaker, concluded that involving humans would make its cars less safe. Google's solution is a prototype with no steering wheel or pedals — human control would be limited to go and

the driver can check out," General Motors spokesman Dan Flores said. "You can relax, glance away, but you still have to be aware because you know the technology's not foolproof." One riddle automakers must solve: How to get

"If it is done courteously and subtle and not annoying, it could be missed by someone that is distracted," said Greg Fitch, a research scientist at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. Then again, the way the car interacts with



This photo shows Virginia Tech Center for Technology Development Program Administration Specialist Greg Brown behind the wheel of a driverless car during a test ride showing the alert system handing over automation to the driver while traveling street in Blacksburg, Va.

(Associated Press)

stop buttons. Meanwhile, traditional automakers are phasing in the technology. Mercedes and Toyota sell cars that can hit the brakes and stay in their lane. By adding new features each year, they might produce a truly self-driving car in about a decade.

One potential hazard of this gradualist approach became clear this fall, when Tesla Motors had to explain that its "auto pilot" feature did not mean drivers could stop paying attention. Several videos posted online showed people recording the novelty — then seizing the wheel when the car made a startling move.

Starting late next year, the Cadillac CTS will get a Super Cruise system, which will allow semi-autonomous highway driving. If the driver's eyes are off the road, and they don't respond to repeated prodding, the car slows.

"We are in no way selling this as a technology where

owners to trust the technology so they'll use it — but not trust it so much that they'll be lulled into a false sense of security and therefore slower to react when the car needs them.

Trust was on the mind of researchers who in August published an extensive report on self-driving cars funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. "Although this trust is essential for widespread adoption, participants were also observed prioritizing non-driving activities over the operation of the vehicle," the authors wrote.

Another wide-open question: How to alert the person in the driver's seat of the need to take over.

It appears that the car should appeal to several senses. Visual warnings alone may not suffice. But combine a light with spoken instructions or physical stimulation such as a vibrating seat, and people react more quickly.

people will be one way automakers differentiate their product — and overbearing warnings may sour potential buyers.

Other issues Fitch cites include "mode confusion" (making sure the car clearly informs the person whether or not it is driving itself) and clear explanations to drivers of what the car can — and cannot — handle.

Cars with the right sensors are becoming really good at monitoring the outside world and have quicker response times than humans. People are much better at making decisions during uncertain circumstances.

One lesson from the Stanford study may be that master and machine are better viewed as collaborators.

"There's really a relationship between drivers and cars," said David Sirkin, who helped run the experiment at Stanford's Center for Design Research, "and that relationship is becoming more a peer relationship." □

Wall Street Wrap: Oil slump sinks energy stocks, indexes

KEN SWEET
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks sank Wednesday as a sharp drop in the price of oil dragged down energy companies. U.S. crude closed below \$40 a barrel for the first time since August.

Investors continue to weigh the implications of potential changes in interest rate

inventories rose by 1.2 million barrels last week, while analysts had expected a decline.

Benchmark U.S. crude dropped \$1.91, or 4.6 percent, to \$39.94 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, which is used to price international oils, fell \$1.95, or 4.4 percent, to \$42.49 a barrel in London.

was reinforced Wednesday, when Fed Chair Janet Yellen indicated that the U.S. economy is on track for an interest rate hike this month, though she was careful to point out that the Fed will need to review any upcoming data before making a final decision.

Government bond prices fell after Yellen's comments. The yield on the 10-



Trader Paul Cosentino works at his post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. Stocks sank Wednesday as a sharp drop in the price of oil dragged down energy companies. U.S. crude closed below \$40 a barrel for the first time since August.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

policy around the world. The European Central Bank meets Thursday to discuss increasing its stimulus program, and the Federal Reserve is likely to raise rates for the first time in nine years at its next policy meeting in mid-December.

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 158.67 points, or 0.9 percent, to 17,729.68. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 23.12 points, or 1.1 percent, to 2,079.51 and the Nasdaq composite lost 33.08 points, or 0.6 percent, to 5,123.22.

Oil and gas stocks fell far more than the rest of the market. Energy stocks in the S&P 500 sank 3.1 percent compared with a 1.1 percent decline in the broader market.

The price of oil was lower all day, and the losses accelerated in the afternoon after the Energy Department reported that U.S. crude

Exxon Mobil fell \$2.34, or 3 percent, to \$79.55, Chevron lost \$2.33, or 2.5 percent, to \$90.25 and drilling rig operator Transocean fell 37 cents, or 2.6 percent, to \$13.83.

In other trading, Yahoo jumped \$1.94, or 6 percent, to \$35.65 on reports that the company was considering selling its core Internet businesses in order to avoid a big tax bill on the eventual sale of its stake in Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba. Yahoo has struggled for years to re-energize its business model. Outside the drop in oil prices, and its impact on energy companies, investors remain focused on what the world's central banks plan to do at their upcoming policy meetings.

The consensus among investors is that the Fed will raise rates at its December 15-16 meeting. That thesis

year Treasury note rose to 2.18 percent from 2.15 percent late Tuesday.

The data Yellen is referring to includes the November jobs report, which comes out Friday. Economists forecast that U.S. employers created 200,000 jobs last month and the unemployment rate remained steady at 5 percent. "It's becoming more and more likely that the Fed is going to rate rates," said Kristina Hooper, Head of U.S. Investment Strategies at Allianz Global Investors. Unless the November employment figures are extraordinarily weak, investors believe the Fed will raise interest rates this month, from record low levels, for the first time since the financial crisis. Some preliminary jobs data out Wednesday supported the prediction that the U.S. jobs market continued to improve last month. □

Yahoo board mulling shareholder demand to sell Internet business

MICHAEL LIEDTKE
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Yahoo's board is considering an activist shareholder's demand to sell the Internet services the company is best known for, a maneuver that might help the company dodge a tax bill of more than \$10 billion looming over its holdings in China's Alibaba Group.

The boardroom intrigue revolves around a recent proposal from Starboard Value, a New York hedge fund that been pressuring Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer to take dramatic steps to boost the company's stock.

Starboard's latest idea is for Yahoo to sell its websites, mobile applications, ad services and data analytics so it can abandon a plan to spin off its 15 percent stake in Alibaba, a thriving e-commerce company. The spinoff is designed to shelter Yahoo from capital-gains taxes on its investment, but it's unclear if the strategy will work. Earlier this year, the Internal Revenue Service declined to guarantee that it would qualify for a tax exemption.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the board will consider selling Yahoo's Internet business, citing people familiar with the situation. The drama began unfolding Wednesday during a meeting that Yahoo's board of directors holds in early December each year.

Yahoo Inc. declined to comment on the board's agenda. The company's advisers, though, have expressed confidence that taxes won't be due in the spinoff, emboldening Mayer and the rest of the board to continue pursuing a breakup that is supposed to be completed later this month or in January.

Mayer is also working on a major overhaul that will jettison an unspecified number of unprofitable Yahoo services and could lay off hundreds of workers. She has promised to provide further details next month.

It could take three years for the tax uncertainty surrounding the proposed Alibaba spinoff to be resolved, Nomura analyst Anthony DiClemente wrote in a note Wednesday.

Starboard's demand evidently prodded the board to consider an alternative way to avoid a tax bill that could wipe out more than two-thirds of the gain on Yahoo's Alibaba stake, which was acquired a decade ago for \$1 billion and is currently worth \$33 billion. If Yahoo's board sticks to the Alibaba spinoff, Starboard is threatening to lead an attempt to oust the nine directors next year.

Analysts have estimated that Yahoo could end up paying anywhere from \$10.5 billion to \$19 billion in taxes, depending on whether China also demands payment on the gains. The potential bill dwarfs the estimated value of Yahoo's operating business, which analysts peg at \$2 billion to \$4 billion, after subtracting the roughly \$7 billion that the company has in the bank.

Yahoo's business has declined in value largely because its net revenue has fallen under Mayer even though advertisers are pouring more money into digital marketing. Most of the dollars, though, are flowing to rivals Google and Facebook.

If Starboard's scenario is embraced, Yahoo's best-known services and, most likely, its brand would be taken over by a new owner, leaving the company as a shell for stakes in Alibaba and Yahoo Japan. Outsell analyst Randy Giusto believes AT&T Inc. might be interested in buying Yahoo's services, taking a page from rival telecommunications provider Verizon Communications, which bought AOL for \$4.4 billion earlier this year. □

Fed says more consumer spending, housing boost US growth

C. S. RUGABER

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve says the U.S. economy grew at a modest pace this fall, lifted by higher consumer spending and more home sales and construction. The Fed said Wednesday in its latest snapshot of the economy that nine of its 12 regional banks reported growth was modest or moderate from early Oc-

tober through mid-November. The New York Fed said growth leveled off, while it slowed in Boston and was mixed in Kansas City.

The Fed's report suggests that healthy consumer spending is offsetting overseas headwinds that have weighed on U.S. manufacturers.

The report, known as the Beige Book, is released eight times a year and consists of anecdotal reports

from businesses in each of the 12 districts.

It will be used for discussion when the central bank next meets Dec. 15-16. Fed officials at that meeting are widely expected to raise interest rates for the first time in nine years.

In a speech Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen signaled that a rate increase is likely, provided that the economy continues to grow at its cur-

rent pace and hiring stays healthy.

The November jobs report will be released Friday, and economists forecast that it will show that employers added 200,000 jobs, while the unemployment rate remained 5 percent.

All 12 of the Fed's districts reported that hiring picked up in the past two months. Many, however, said that the job gains were driven by temporary and entry-

level positions that were filled by staffing firms.

In most districts, wages rose only for skilled positions that companies were having difficulty filling. The Atlanta Fed, however, said there were signs that employers are paying more for entry-level, lower-skilled jobs.

Home sales rose in seven of 12 districts, the Beige Book said, while housing construction increased in most Fed districts as well. □

Record Cyber Monday online spending tops \$3 billion



In this Monday, Nov. 30, 2015, photo, Mark Oldenburg processes outgoing orders at Amazon.com's fulfillment center in DuPont, Wash. Shoppers spent more than \$3 billion online this "Cyber Monday," making it the biggest online shopping day ever.

(AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

MAE ANDERSON

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers spent more than \$3 billion online this "Cyber Monday," making it the biggest online shopping day ever. Research firm comScore said shopping by phone, laptop or tablet jumped 21 percent to \$3.11 billion

Monday, fueled by a 53 percent surge in spending via mobile devices.

The 10-year-old shopping holiday has lost some of its luster as retailers start sales even earlier than the traditional Thanksgiving and Black Friday sprees. Yet "Cyber Monday" has become engrained in the

minds of enough shoppers and it endures as the top online spending day of the year.

"Despite some talk of Cyber Monday declining in importance, the day's historical highs and continued strong growth rates confirm it is still a hugely important shopping event," said

comScore chairman emeritus Gian Fulgoni.

It's the sixth year in a row that Cyber Monday has been top online sales day on record.

Mobile spending, or sales via smartphones and tablets, jumped 53 percent to \$838 million, making up 27 percent of total online spending.

Top online shopping destinations included Amazon, Walmart, eBay, Target and Best Buy.

The spending spree comes even as several retailers had problems during Cyber Monday. Amazon said some orders in the U.S. and Canada had incorrectly applied shipping charges, but it discovered the error and refunded the charges. Target's Web site was briefly offline due to high traffic. ComScore expects online sales to rise 14 percent to \$70.06 billion during the November and December shopping period, slowing slightly from last year's 15 percent rise. Online sales make up 10 percent of

overall retail sales, but that increases to 15 percent during the holidays as online shoppers snap up Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals, according to research firm Forrester.

The name "Cyber Monday" was coined in 2005 by the National Retail Federation's online arm, called Shop.org, to encourage people to shop online. The name was also a nod to online shopping being done at work where faster connections made it easier to browse. Now, even with broadband access, Cyber Monday continues to be a day when retailers pull out big promotions.

The NRF estimates overall sales for November and December will rise 3.7 percent to \$630.5 billion compared with last year.

Another firm that tracks online spending, MasterCard Advisors, said e-commerce sales for last month and the Thanksgiving weekend rose 13.4 percent compared with the year-ago period. □

Survey: US businesses hired at healthy pace last month

C. S. RUGABER

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — American businesses stepped up hiring last month, led by strong gains in retail, finance and other service industries, a private survey found.

Payroll processor ADP said Wednesday that companies added 217,000 jobs last month, the most in five months. Service sector firms

added 204,000, while manufacturers hired just 6,000.

The figures come just two days before the government issues its official jobs report for November. Economists forecast that it will show employers added 200,000 jobs last month and the unemployment rate remained 5 percent.

A robust jobs report at the end of this week would make it very likely that the

Federal Reserve would raise short-term interest rates later this month for the first time in nine years.

Steady consumer spending is supporting greater hiring in services, which includes higher-paying professional positions such as information technology and engineering jobs.

That is helping to offset weak job gains in sectors like manufacturing, which

is struggling with faltering economies overseas and the strong dollar.

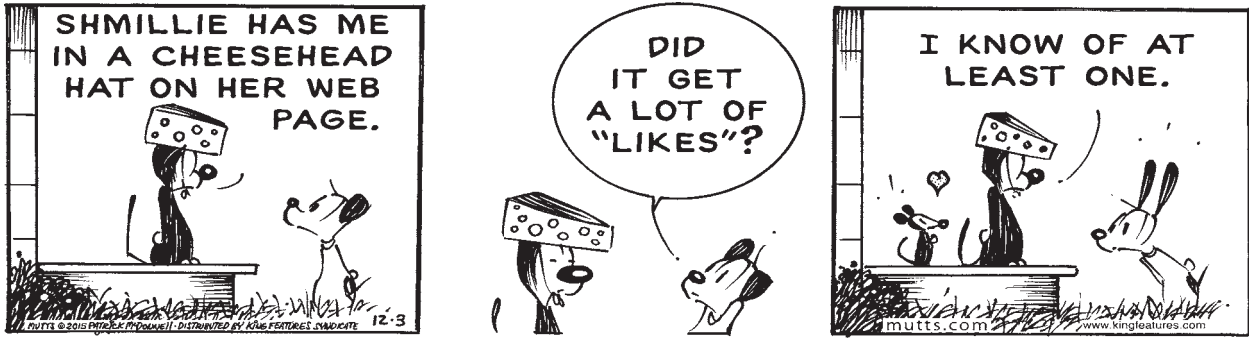
The ADP survey covers only private businesses and frequently diverges from the official figures. ADP's hiring tallies were much higher than the government's in August and September, and then were far below the government's estimate last month.

Mark Zandi, chief econo-

mist at Moody's Analytics, which compiles the ADP data, said that hiring was strong in nearly all industries outside the oil and gas sector, which has been battered by low oil prices, and factories that compete with overseas producers.

The dollar has jumped about 13 percent in value this year, which makes U.S. goods more expensive overseas. □

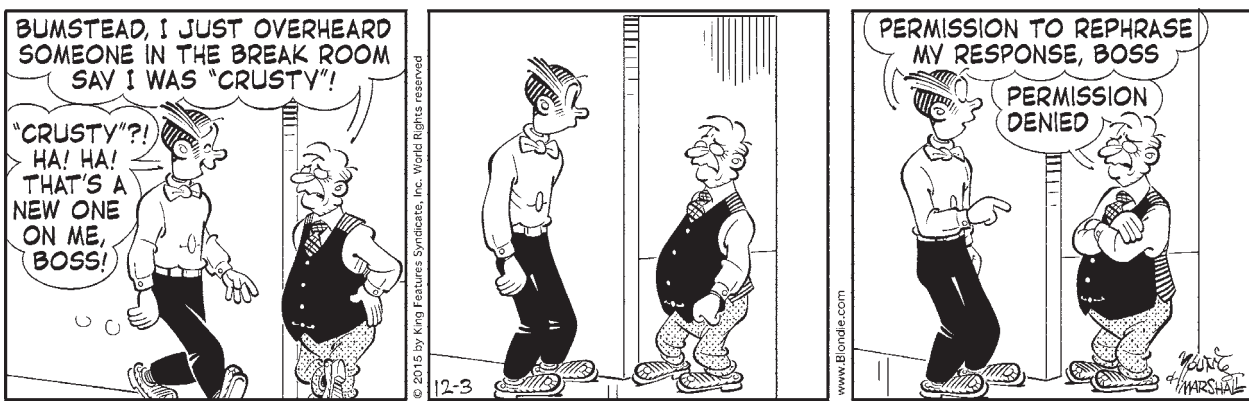
Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

			9	4	7		6	
						2	1	8
							7	
1				9				7
3			4		5			9
9				2				6
	9							
2	4	3						
	8		5	1	2			

Difficulty Level ★★

12/03

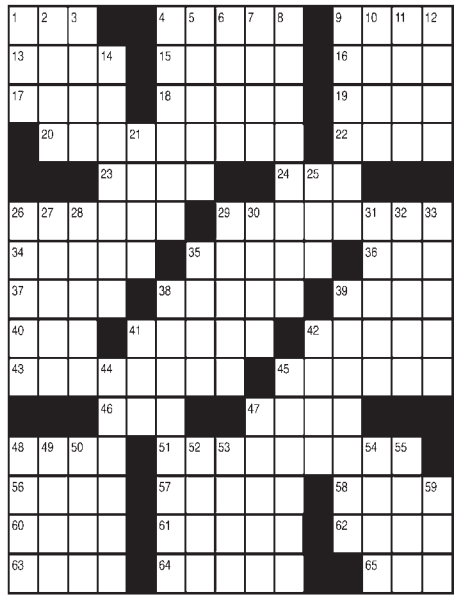
Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

1	9	7	5	8	6	3	4	2
8	5	3	9	4	2	7	6	1
4	6	2	7	3	1	5	8	9
3	7	1	8	9	4	2	5	6
6	4	8	1	2	5	9	3	7
9	2	5	6	7	3	8	1	4
5	3	4	2	1	7	6	9	8
7	1	9	3	6	8	4	2	5
2	8	6	4	5	9	1	7	3

ACROSS

- "Cat ___ Hot Tin Roof"
- Remove the lid from
- Make fun of
- Marries
- Stash away
- Up to the task
- Slothful
- Overly sentimental
- ___ in; bring under control
- Answers
- Clerical error
- Throw
- Like dangerous winter roads
- Agree to take
- Snail on a plate
- Pillow covers
- Wide
- Actor Wallach
- Joints nearest the belly button
- Pacify; make quiet
- Injure
- Go astray
- Tiny weight
- Sculpt
- Tangiest
- German rulers' title, once
- Bullring shout
- Young miss
- Gyro bread
- Essential thing
- Lion's cry
- Hay bundles
- ___-do-well; bum
- Hole-making tools
- Clear the slate
- Festive event
- Gender
- Discontinued
- ___ as a fox



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/3/15

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

W	E	L	D	A	P	R	I	L	S	T	A	G
A	V	I	D	D	R	O	N	E	H	U	L	L
S	A	V	E	V	U	L	N	E	R	A	B	L
P	S	I	V	I	N	E	R	A	S	E		
N	I	E	C	E	B	C	D					
D	E	G	R	E	E	B	L	A	S	T		
E	R	R	O	R	S	T	R	I	P			
L	O	O	N	C	H	E	A	P	D	A	L	E
I	D	O	P	L	A	N	T	M	A	J	O	R
E	M	B	L	E	M	H	O	N	E	S	T	
O	A	F										
I	S	A	A	C	H	A	N	D	T	W	O	
O	P	P	R	E	S	S	I	N	G	R	O	A
T	I	E	D	P	I	E	C	E	U	R	G	E
A	N	D	S	A	S	S	E	S	E			

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12/3/15

DOWN

- Hooting bird
- Close by
- Shaping tool
- Maximum; highest degree
- Parts of speech

- Isle of ___; resort near Naples
- Build
- Shoe bottom
- ___ up; prepares
- Martini garnish
- Stopwatch user

- Hot cross ___; sweet treats
- Drone's mate
- Sending
- Grease
- Vehicles
- Rough; not fine
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AP test: Rio Olympic water badly polluted, even far offshore



Workers remove garbage collected by floating waste barriers in the Meriti River, which flows into Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A new round of testing by The Associated Press shows the city's Olympic waterways are as rife with pathogens far offshore as they are nearer land, where raw sewage flows into them from fetid rivers and storm drains.

(AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

BRAD BROOKS
Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) —

The Olympic waters in this city are more widely contaminated by sewage than previously known and pose a greater threat to athletes' health ahead of next year's games, according to new results from tests commissioned by The Associated Press.

Expanded analysis of Rio's waterways shows that high viral and in some cases bacterial counts are found not just along shorelines where raw sewage runs into waterbodies, but far

offshore where athletes will compete in sailing, rowing and canoeing.

That means there is no dilution factor in the bay or lagoon where events will take place.

"It's going to increase the exposure of the people who come into contact with those waters," said Kristina Mena, a U.S. expert in waterborne viruses. "If we saw those levels here in the United States on beaches, officials would likely close those beaches."

In July, the AP reported that its first round of tests

showed viruses causing stomach and respiratory illnesses and more rarely heart and brain inflammation at levels up to 1.7 million times what would be considered highly alarming in the U.S. or Europe.

The report prompted sports officials to promise they would do their own viral testing. Those pledges took on further urgency in August, after pre-Olympic rowing and sailing events in Rio led to illnesses among athletes nearly double the acceptable limit in the U.S. Nevertheless, Olympic and World Health Organization

officials have flip-flopped on promises to carry out their own viral testing in the wake of the AP's July report.

At issue are two kinds of testing.

Brazilian, Olympic and WHO officials now say Brazil needs only to conduct testing for bacterial "markers" of pollution to determine water quality. That's the standard for nations around the globe to monitor waterbodies, mostly because it's been historically easier and cheaper.

"The health and safety of athletes is always a top priority and there is no doubt that water within the field of play meets the relevant standards," the Rio 2016 Olympic organizing committee said in an emailed statement Tuesday. "Rio 2016 follows the expert advice of the World Health Organization, whose guidelines for Safe Recreational Water Environments recommend classifying water through a regular program of microbial water quality testing." However, in recent years technological advances have made it simpler and less expensive to monitor viral levels, too.

Studies dating back decades have shown little to no correlation between the levels of bacteria pathogens in water, which quickly break down in salty and sunny conditions like those in tropical Brazil, and the presence of viruses, which have been shown to last for months, and in some cases years.

Rio's waterways, like those of many developing nations, are extremely contaminated because most of the city's sewage is untreated, flowing into Guanabara Bay, the

Rodrigo Freitas Lagoon and the famous Copacabana Beach. Rio won the right to host the Olympics based on a lengthy bid document that promised to clean up the city's scenic waterways by improving sewage sanitation, a pledge that was intended to be one of the event's biggest legacies.

Brazilian officials now acknowledge that won't happen.

The AP's first published results were based on samples taken along the shores of the lagoon where rowing and canoeing events will be held. Other samples were drawn from the marina where sailors enter the water and in the Copacabana Beach surf, where marathon and triathlon swimming will take place. Ipanema Beach, popular with tourists and where many of the expected 350,000 foreign visitors will take a dip during the games, was also tested.

Since then, the AP expanded its testing to include offshore sampling sites inside Olympic sailing courses in Guanabara Bay and in the middle of the lagoon where rowing and canoeing lanes were located during recent test events. Not only has the AP testing since August found the waterbodies to be consistently virus-laden throughout, but it also captured a spike in the bacterial fecal coliforms in the lagoon — to over 16 times the amount permitted under Brazilian law.

Athletes have made efforts to avoid falling ill, from bleaching rowing oars to preemptively taking antibiotics, which have no effect on viruses, to simply hosing off their bodies the second they finish competing. □

In massive stranding, 337 whales beached in Chile

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) —

The coast of southern Chile has become a grave for 337 sea whales that were found beached in what scientists say is one of the biggest whale strandings ever recorded.

Biologist Vreni Haussermann told The Associated Press this week that she

made the discovery along with other scientists in June during an observation flight over fjords in Chile's southern Patagonia region.

The team has been collecting samples since then. She declined to disclose the conclusions, which will be published by a scientific journal later this year.

The cause of death of the whales is unknown, although human intervention has been ruled out.

The scientific expedition counted 305 bodies and 32 skeletons of whales through aerial and satellite photography in an area between the Gulf of Penas and Puerto Natales. □

Spike Lee rips Rahm Emanuel on 'Chi-Raq' orange carpet

RACHELLE BLIDNER

JOHN CARUCCI

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Kind words were in short supply for Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel at the premiere of Spike Lee's "Chi-Raq" on Tuesday night.

Emanuel fired the city's police superintendent Tuesday after tensions flared over the release of a graphic video that showed a black teenager, Laquan McDonald, being shot 16 times by a white police officer. Lee predicted at the premiere, held before he and cast members participated in an anti-gun violence march, that "some more heads are gonna roll." The police superintendent "is not going to be the only one," Lee said.

Lee's satire is based on the ancient Greek play "Lysistrata" by Aristophanes. This modern adaptation is about the murder of a child hit by a stray bullet in Chicago's South Side, and the group of women that organize a unique way of dealing with the ongoing violence; they hold back sex. Chicago actor John Cusack, who appears in the film, said the shootings and killings in Chicago each year are "unacceptable," and cited political motives. He said the police officer involved in shooting the 17-year-old wasn't charged or the superintendent fired until the

city's election had passed. Emanuel won a second term earlier this year. The shooting took place in 2014.

"It's very tragic that information was suppressed for an election cycle," Cusack said.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, who walked the film's orange carpet before the premiere, said the power of the satire can send a message to young people about gun violence more than Tuesday's announcement in Chicago.

The movie's kickoff segued into the anti-gun violence march. Lee, Sharpton and members of the film's cast joined about 150 people who marched from a midtown theater to Times Square. Actor John Turturro, who isn't in the movie, marched with them.

Activists wore orange beanies with pompom tops. The color was chosen from the vests hunters wear as a "don't shoot me sign," said Cleo Pendleton, whose 15-year-old daughter, Hadiya Pendleton, was killed in Chicago in 2013. Lee even wore orange-framed glasses.

Actor Nick Cannon, who portrays Chi-Raq in the movie, said the march was being held "for the right reasons."

"We've got to get out here and express our pain the right way," he said.

The Rev. Michael Pfleger, a



John Cusack, left, and Spike Lee attend the premiere of "Chi-Raq" at the Ziegfeld Theatre on Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2015, in New York. (Photo by Charles Sykes/Invision/AP)

Catholic priest and social activist from Chicago who is the basis for Cusack's character in the movie, urged the crowd to pledge to end gun violence. □

Football leads NBC network to first weekly win of season

DAVID BAUDER

AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Thanksgiving week left NBC with, well, a lot to be thankful for.

Behind two sizzling football games, the network won the Nielsen company's weekly prime-time crown for the first time this television season. NBC frequently won during the summer, but the last time it won during the traditional TV season came on Super Bowl week last winter, Nielsen said.

The Thanksgiving night

game between Chicago and Green Bay drew 27.8 million viewers, the biggest audience for a night game on the holiday in the decade NBC has been showing them.

With Denver toppling previously unbeaten New England on Sunday night, the game was seen by more than 25 million people, Nielsen said.

Nielsen does not immediately have an estimate of how many people watched the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on NBC Thanksgiving. □









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Acting Legend Michael Caine reflects on 'Youth' and old age

JAKE COYLE

AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Caine sits down for lunch at the St. Regis Hotel in midtown New York clutching a copy of the day's Daily News given to him by the hotel doorman, who's earmarked a photo of Caine and his "Youth" co-star Jane Fonda.

"You wonder why I stay here," he chuckles. "I always remember the sort of joke thing the British paper

where the journalist said to the duchess, 'What's the best restaurant in London?' And she said, 'Where you're known, dear.' And I apply that to a lot of what I do."

Caine, 82, is known just about everywhere. Some know him as the star of British classics like "Alfie," "The Italian Job" and "Get Carter." Others know him as Batman's butler. Some might even know him just by the ubiquitous impressions of



This photo provided by Fox Searchlight shows Michael Caine as Fred Ballinger in "Youth." The movie opens in U.S. theaters on Dec. 4, 2015.

(Gianni Fiorito/Fox Searchlight via AP)

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SUN & HOL 3:30 | 6:20 | 9:10

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MON-FRI 4:50 | 7:05
SAT 2:35 | 4:50 | 7:05
SUN & HOL 2:35 | 4:50 | 7:05
2D VERSION
MON-THURS 4:10 | 6:25 | 8:40
FRI 4:10 | 6:25 | 8:40 | 10:55
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THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2

MON-FRI 9:10
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his indelible cockney accent, like Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon's dueling Michael Caines in "The Trip." In Paolo Sorrentino's "Youth," in which he plays an aged, regretful classical composer, Caine puts a capstone on a career that has traveled from working-class upstart to cinema institution. Like most things in life, he's enjoying it.

"I've been nominated (for best actor) four times and I have never won," he says, smiling. "I fly for 11 hours to clap another actor and then go home. It's a long way! So I'm not exactly clearing shelves. I've got two Oscars, anyway."

Sorrentino, the Italian director of the Oscar-winning "The Great Beauty," wanted Caine for his combination of authority and levity — a description that hits on Caine's unique blend of good cheer and gravitas. Caine doesn't share his character's melancholy, but he's similarly reflective, and an eager, colorful storyteller.

ON RETIREMENT

What am I going to do? Sit around and watch soaps on television all day? That's why I never retired. I retire mentally every time. I regard myself retired now. I don't have another script to do, so I'm retired. I always had this phrase that I said many times to reporters: You don't retire in mov-

ies. Movies retire you. (AP: Yet they're not.) That's the point. I retire and they say, "Oh, no you're not."

ON HIS BREAKTHROUGH

"Alfie" was a stage play which I auditioned for and never got. I was the last choice of anybody. I shared a flat with Terence Stamp and he was offered "Alfie." I spent two days trying to talk him into doing it. Laurence Harvey, Anthony Newley were offered it. Funny enough, everyone turned it down because there was an abortion sequence in it. It was the first time I was nominated for an Oscar. But I had seen Paul Scofield in "A Man for All Seasons," so I didn't even bother to turn up.

ON COMING TO HOLLYWOOD

The first party I went to in Hollywood, Shirley MacLaine gave to welcome me to Hollywood. The first people to walk in were Gloria Swanson and Frank Sinatra. I was dumbstruck. Then she took me to dinner at Danny Kaye's house. There were only two other people there. One was Cary Grant and the other one was Prince Philip. I'm sitting there. I've been in Hollywood for three weeks. I took Shirley home. She lived in the Valley. As we got near to her home, I said, "Look! Your house is on fire." She said, "Michael, that's steam from

the pool."

ON POOL SCENE OF 'YOUTH' WITH A NAKED BEAUTY MODEL

Paolo never told us about that, you know. He said to Harvey (Keitel) and me, "Get in the pool. There's no dialogue." He said "Action!" and Madalina (Ghe-nea) walked in. Well that's the best acting you've ever seen on our faces because that's absolute reality.

ON PLAYING OLDER PARTS

I had had great success in movies. I had done 61, 62. And I got a script and I sent it back to the producer with a note saying I didn't want to do it, the part was too small. And he sent it back with a note saying, "I didn't want you to read the lover. I wanted you to read the father." That's when, as I like to say, you stop getting the girl, but you get the part.

ON ONE SIMILARITY WITH HIS 'YOUTH' CHARACTER

There's a scene at the doctor's where I go to see the results of my exam and he says to me: "What's it like feeling old?" And what struck me is the line I said to him, which is: "I don't understand how I got here." Six years ago I was 35. How the hell have I gotten to be 82? A reporter once said to me, "How do you feel about growing old?" And I said to him, "Well, considering the alternative, fabulous." □

Bono, Biden, Cyrus celebrate fight against AIDS at concert

MESFIN FEKADU

AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — At an all-star event honoring the nonprofits ONE and (RED), co-founder Bono wanted to make one thing clear: "This is not a charity concert."

Instead, the U2 frontman wanted to celebrate the achievements in the fight against AIDS with the help of Miley Cyrus, Vice President Joe Biden, Sting and Stephen Colbert on Tuesday, which was World AIDS Day.

"This is a celebration. This is an instigation. This is a provocation. This is not a charity concert," Bono told the audience at Carnegie Hall in New York.

Bono thanked his supporters, spoke about AIDS statistics and rocked onstage with the Edge, performing U2 hits like "Every Breaking Wave," "Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of" and "Angels of Harlem."

Biden, who appeared with his wife Jill Biden, said Bono impressed him by convincing leaders to assist the advocacy organizations ONE and (RED), including the



Bono, right, and The Edge perform at "It Always Seems Impossible Until It Is Done: A Night of Music with ONE and (RED)", in celebration of World AIDS Day, at Carnegie Hall on Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2015, in New York.

(Photo by Greg Allen/Invision/AP)

late Sen. Jesse Helms.

"I was there when Bono walked in, met Jesse Helms for the first time and convinced Jesse Helms in one fell swoop to forgive \$6 billion in third-world debt. ...That's when I became a disciple of the church of Bono," Biden said.

Biden also paid tribute to former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, one of the night's honorees. Sting spoke highly of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria's former finance minister, while former President Bill Clinton — who earned rock star applause when he entered

the stage — highlighted work done by entrepreneur Mo Ibrahim. Clinton noted that Ibrahim's daughter, Hadeel, is on the board of directors of the Clinton Foundation.

Colbert, who was onstage to honor Bill and Melinda Gates, said Bono told him

that an inspiring conversation with Bill Gates led the singer-activist to create ONE, which launched in 2004. He launched (RED) in 2006.

"He said the Gates didn't only just write a check. ...Bill Gates helped 'professionalize' the organization," Colbert said. "Bill Gates brought his brain power, his insights, his business acumen, his understanding of the role commerce would play in wiping out poverty." Colbert urged governments to continue to work together to assist the organization soon "because Donald Trump," he said, pausing as the audience laughed, "if he's elected, all bets are off. Just tear up your history books and live in a cage because it's every man for himself."

The night featured more comical moments. "Daily Show" host Trevor Noah, who is from South Africa, joked about why Bono asked him to host the event.

"I'm the perfect guy for the AIDS event because I'm from Africa?" Noah said, recalling his conversation with Bono. □

Chris Brown cancels Down Under tour after visa troubles

NICK PERRY

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand

(AP) — Chris Brown canceled plans for a Down Under tour Wednesday after Australian authorities earlier warned the troubled R&B singer they were likely to refuse him a visa because of his criminal conviction for assaulting pop star Rihanna. Ticketing agency Ticketek posted a statement from Brown's promoters saying the planned December tour of Australia and New Zealand had been canceled and those who had bought tickets would get refunds. In the statement, Brown thanked his fans and said he remained hopeful he could tour "in the near future."

In the U.S., Brown's planned appearance Tuesday on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" was cancelled. The network would not say

why.

Citing privacy concerns, Australia's immigration department on Wednesday declined to say whether they had refused Brown a visa. But in September, the department issued Brown a "notice of intention to consider refusal" which gave him 28 days to explain why he should be allowed into the country.

That notice came days after former Immigration Minister Michaelia Cash urged authorities to refuse the 26-year-old American a visa on character grounds. "People need to understand if you are going to commit domestic violence and then you want to travel around the world, there are going to be countries that say to you: 'You cannot come in because you are not of the character we expect in Australia,'" Cash, who is now minister



Grammy award-winning singer Chris Brown performs at a club in Macau. Brown canceled plans for a Down Under tour Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015 after Australian authorities had earlier warned the troubled R&B singer they were likely to refuse him a visa because of his criminal conviction for assaulting pop star Rihanna.

(AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

for women, told reporters at the time.

As part of his tour, Brown had been scheduled to play one show in Auckland, New Zealand. Immigration authorities in New Zealand said Brown had withdrawn

his application for a visa to work and travel there before they ruled on it.

New Zealand authorities said that because Brown had been banned from some other countries, he would have needed a

special visa to be allowed entry. They said Brown had applied for a visa once previously, in 2008, which they had granted.

Brown could not be immediately reached for comment Wednesday. In a September statement, Brown's publicist Nicole Perna said the singer respected Australia's right to review his visa request and had "faith that a decision will be made with the full consideration of his continued personal growth, on-going philanthropic endeavors and desire to perform for his fans."

Activists in Australia had campaigned to ban the singer from the country because of his brutal attack on his then-girlfriend, Rihanna, hours before the 2009 Grammy Awards. He pleaded guilty to felony assault and was freed from probation this year. □

Hanson hops from singing MMMBop to brewing their own beer



In this photo from left to right, brothers Zac Hanson, Isaac Hanson and Taylor Hanson pose for a photo at Oklahoma City Brewing Company, in Oklahoma City. In 18 years the trio went from belting out “MMMBop” to brewing their own Mmmhops beer.
(Matthew Swaggart/Hanson Brothers Beer via AP)

J.M. HIRSCH
AP Food Editor

NEW YORK (AP) — The problem with getting liquored up with the Hanson brothers — yes, the “MMMBop” boys — is that you can’t get that tune out of your head the entire time you’re talking to them. Or for days after. Apologies for the ear worm.

The only consolation is that they’re no longer boys, which makes the whole affair seem less icky. Because when you say to yourself, “I’m going drinking with Hanson,” the mental image is of pounding back a few with the bouncy preteens from those “ba du bop, ba duba dop” music video days. Luckily, like the rest of us, they grew up. And it turns out, they grew into really nice guys who not only are still making music, they also are pleasantly obsessed with craft beer. So obsessed, in fact, that they’ve launched their own, a pale ale. Care to guess the name? Give it a



This photo shows, Hanson Brothers Mmmhops in Concord, NH. In 18 years the trio went from belting out “MMMBop” to brewing their own Mmmhops beer.

(AP Photo/Matthew Mead)

moment. You’ll get there. Think... That’s right. You can now pop open an Mmmhops (tagline: From the Guys That Invented Mmmhops). Which is how I recently found myself at a whiskey bar, huddled around a bottle of Jefferson Rye with Isaac, Taylor

and Zac Hanson. Their music careers have chugged along pleasantly since 1997, the year “MMMBop” was seared into our pop ethos. Careers quiet by industry standards, yet robust enough with a fervent fan core to keep the brothers happy.

Meanwhile, 18 years of tours and time on the road means they’ve sampled a whole lot of good (and bad) beer. (You can do the math. They are 34, 32 and 30, respectively, and are pretty shameless about how long they’ve been sipping suds.)

“We traveled the world as kids and we got turned on to great beer,” said Isaac Hanson. “At some point you decide to take something you really like and turn it into a business you love.” A few years ago — around the same time they launched the Hop Jam beer and music festival in Tulsa, Oklahoma — they started playing around with making their own beer. The brothers found they not only enjoyed the process, but the results weren’t so bad, either. So at the end of their 2013 tour, they put off work on a new album to focus on brewing. Eventually, they contracted with Mustang Brewing Company in Oklahoma City to make the operation legit and today Mmmhops — winner of a gold medal from the Beverage Tasting Institute in 2014 — is available in 16 states.

And though the brothers — now all married and all with multiple children — see their music and beer in a symbiotic relationship, they’re not averse to the thrill of one outshining the other.

“Hey! We won a gold medal for our beer before we won a Grammy,” said Taylor Hanson. “I’ll take that!”

Despite the name the beer isn’t overtly hoppy. Because sometimes the pun must lead. But snicker if you will; it’s actually a pretty good beer: citrusy, clean tasting and totally drinkable. The brothers see it as an entry point to craft brews, particularly for fans of their music. An odd correlation? Not really. Craft brews, the Hanson brothers and their fans all came of age together. “The fans literally have grown up with us,” said Taylor Hanson.

And they soon may have more bottles to choose from. Zac Hanson says the trio is working on additional beers, including a saison, an amber and something a bit hoppier. □